

1980

Jack London's South Sea Narratives.

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JACK LONDON'S SOUTH SEA NARRATIVES

The Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical Col.

PH.D.

1980

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JACK LONDON'S SOUTH SEA NARRATIVES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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in

The Department of English

by
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ABSTRACT

Although Jack London is recognized as one of the most popular American fiction writers in the world, critics of American literary naturalism have tended to rank him considerably below the other well-known naturalists: Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser. The consensus has been that London wrote too much, too hastily, and weakened his art by imposing "ideas" (Darwinian, Spencerian, Nietzschean, Marxian) upon his narratives. However, in recent years a serious reevaluation of "the boy wonder of the naturalist carnival" has begun. As a master of the action narrative, Jack London, who both mirrored his age and anticipated later twentieth-century literary trends, is now receiving deserved attention.

Nonetheless, most of this interest has centered upon London's Northland classics, such as The Call of the Wild, and his apocalyptic visions of social revolution, such as The Iron Heel, while the most outlying and, in many ways, the most fascinating of the author's fictive worlds, the South Pacific, has remained relatively uncharted. This is a serious omission, for in two novels, a travel book, and in four complete short story collections, as well as

in miscellaneous short stories and articles, Jack London drew upon the personal experiences of his cruise through Polynesia and Melanesia (1907-1909) to extend his literary landscape.

This study is intended to help fill this gap in London scholarship by focusing upon the themes and motifs of these South Sea narratives which distinguish these works from the rest of the author's canon. A work-by-work analysis in the reader's guide tradition has not been attempted. Rather, sixteen narratives (The Cruise of the Snark, "The House of Mapuhi," "The Pearls of Parlay," "Mauki," "Yah! Yah! Yah!," "The Inevitable White Man," "The Seed of McCoy," "The House of Pride," "Koolau the Leper," "The Chinago," Adventure, "On the Makaloa Mat," "The Water Baby," "The Bones of Kahekili," "Shin Bones," and "The Red One") are utilized to illustrate these distinctive thematic elements. Most noteworthy are London's blending of romantic, realistic, and naturalistic elements in narratives of idealized heroes struggling for dominance in a deterministic universe; his explicit, often excessive, use of violence and death to demonstrate the naturalist's law of life; his conflicting visions of "natural man"--Polynesian and Melanesian, god and devil, respectively; his use of irony to

undercut his own dogmatically espoused opinions regarding white racial superiority; and, finally, his use of Jungian theories in his last South Sea stories to explore the possibilities of escape from the spirit-destroying trap of determinism.

CHAPTER I

LONDON, THE CRITICS, AND THE SOUTH SEA NARRATIVES

"An' the Golden Gate! There's the Pacific Ocean beyond, and China, an' Japan, an' India, an' . . . an' all the coral islands. You can go anywhere out through the Golden Gate. . . . Why, all them places are just waitin' for me to come an' see 'em. . . . I'm not going to live in Oakland the rest of my life. . . . I'm goin' to get away . . . away. . . ."

--Jack London, The Valley of the Moon

When Earle Labor addressed the Michigan College English Association in 1963, Sam S. Baskett introduced him as "the other Jack London scholar."¹ While intended to draw a few chuckles, Baskett's comment only slightly exaggerated the state of London scholarship roughly half a century after the author's death. Although Jack London (1876-1916) was the most popular and most highly paid American fiction writer of the first decade and a half of this century, his critical reputation has never been of the first order. His strongly deterministic tales of violence played out against stark, elemental landscapes so alien to the "Genteel Tradition" of New England, the everyday or "representative" realism of William Dean Howells, and the labyrinthine psychological realism of Henry James

2

were summarily dismissed by much of the literary community of his day. As Joan R. Sherman has noted, "with the exception of his earliest Klondike tales and The Call of the Wild, London received negative or, at best, mixed reviews from the literary elite on both sides of the Atlantic."² Yet if the Establishment rejected this West Coast radical, the reading public read and welcomed him with open minds and wallets--his income from writing alone averaged seventy thousand dollars a year for the last thirteen years of his life, despite his avowed socialism and a private life which repudiated the standards of the American ideal.

In essence, Jack London and his literary achievement were a focal point of what Sinclair Lewis described as "the clash between Main Street and Beacon Street that is eternal in American culture."³ The scene which best dramatized this clash was recorded by Lewis as follows:

The high literary point was watching Jack London read Henry James for the first time. . . .

At a neighboring cabin [at Carmel, California] Jack picked up James's The Wings of the Dove and, standing there, short, burly, in soft shirt and black tie, the Master read aloud in a bewildered way while Henry James's sliding, slithering, glittering verbiage unwound itself on and on. Jack banged the book down and wailed, "Do, any of you know what all this junk is about?"⁴

Since his death in 1916, London has remained an extremely popular writer with the general reading public both in America and abroad. In fact, with his works translated into more than eighty languages and with interest in his fiction especially strong in the Soviet Union, he is probably the most widely read American writer in the world. Serious critical attention, however, has been slow in developing. Academic critics of the thirties and forties seldom dealt with his works other than to describe The Call of the Wild, The Sea-Wolf, "To Build a Fire," "The Law of Life," or "The White Silence" as a powerful fictional rendering of the popularized Darwinian world view. And general studies of American naturalism have tended to rank him considerably below the other well-known naturalists: Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser, the consensus being that London wrote too much, too hastily, and weakened his art by imposing "ideas" (Darwinian, Spencerian, Nietzschean, Marxian) upon his fictional narratives. His work is, at best, uneven, with perhaps a half dozen of his fifty-three books worthy of even passing consideration.

Yet the short shrift given his literary achievement by the literati did little to affect the interest in Jack London, the man, as well as his work, which is evidenced

by the series of biographies published between the twenties and the present. Charmian London's The Book of Jack London (1921), Irving Stone's best-seller Jack London: Sailor on Horse Back (1938), Joan London's Jack London and His Times (1939), Richard O'Connor's Jack London: A Biography (1964), Franklin Walker's Jack London and the Klondike (1966), Robert Barltrop's Jack London: The Man, the Writer, the Rebel (1976), Andrew Sinclair's Jack (1977), and Russ Kingman's A Pictorial Life of Jack London (1979) attest to the unflagging interest in Jack London of a sizeable audience.

It was not until the early sixties, however, that the scholarly community seriously began to reevaluate the "boy wonder of the naturalist carnival" who refused to stay buried. Scholars such as Earle Labor, Sam S. Bassett, King Hendricks, James E. Sisson III, Irving Shepard, Dale L. Walker, and James I. McClintock began to question the negative clichés which traditionally dominated discussion of London's work and to replace cursory scholarship with close critical analysis that recognized and stressed the long-ignored virtues of the writer's better work: notably an effective use of irony in dramatizing the struggles of the individual in a naturalistic universe; a mastery of the short narrative whose chief virtue is the

"new prose" of "the modern fictionist--clear, straight-forward, uncluttered, imagistic--that is particularly well suited to the short story and to the depiction of violence and physical action";⁵ and finally a willingness to pioneer previously eschewed subject matter: alcoholism in John Barleycorn (1913); abnormal psychology in "Told in the Drooling Ward" (1914), which is remarkably similar to Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest; penal reform in The Star Rover (1915); political corruption in Theft (1910); sociological studies of the downtrodden in The People of the Abyss (1903), which influenced George Orwell to write Down and Out in Paris and London, and in The Road (1907), an account of his hobo travels which laid the foundation of a new genre to be developed by such later writers as Dos Passos, Steinbeck, and Kerouac; violent social revolution in The Iron Heel (1908); and the fight game in The Game (1905), "A Piece of Steak" (1909), and The Abysmal Brute (1913).

Since 1960, at least sixteen doctoral dissertations have dealt wholly or in part with London's fiction. In 1965 Hendricks and Shepard published Letters From Jack London, a partial but extremely valuable source of primary materials; in 1967 the Jack London Newsletter began publication, shortly followed by The London Collector, 1970,

and What's New About London, Jack?, 1971; and within the past four years three scholarly journals, Western American Literature, The Pacific Historian, and Modern Fiction Studies, have devoted special issues to Jack London and his work. Obviously, Jack London is gaining respectability, and interest in his achievement shows no sign of lessening.

The two most significant contributions to this growth of Jack London scholarship have been Earle Labor's Jack London (1974) and James I. McClintock's White Logic: Jack London's Short Stories (1975). These works form the foundation upon which subsequent studies should be built. Labor's book, a contribution to the "Twayne's United States Authors Series," is a compact, well-balanced general appraisal of London's achievement, which, without making extravagant claims for its subject, argues for the academic community's consideration of London as a writer of merit. In this critical biography, Labor views Jack London, as well as his typical hero, as the personification of R. W. E. Lewis's American Adam--"a radically new personality, the hero of the new adventure: an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his

own unique and inherent resources."⁶ And he attributes the naturalist's universal appeal to his mastery of the action narrative and "the mythopoeic force" of his "primordial vision" which elicits a response from the psychological depths of his readers. To support his overview of London's fiction, Labor focuses on representative works, with his readings of The Call of the Wild, Martin Eden, "To Build a Fire," The Sea-Wolf, and The Scarlet Plague being particularly perceptive.

James I. McClintock's White Logic, although a more specialized work, is, nevertheless, equally valuable. Dealing exclusively with Jack London's short stories, the critic traces the development of form and theme in his tales from "the initial stage in his apprenticeship," 1898, to the year of his death, 1916. According to McClintock, Kipling's short fiction and Herbert Spencer's Philosophy of Style taught London that "nothing should stand between the reader and the direct apprehension of the writer's ideas. The writer should never confuse the reader by using intricate plots, complex characters, subtleties of emotion or a Latinate vocabulary."⁷ To effectively convey his ideas, the author experimented with and mastered the essay-exemplum, the frame story, and finally the third-person limited narrative formats.

Thematically, McClintock interprets London's stories as dramatizing the "dynamic tension between actuality and ideals, between the disturbing natural truths thrust upon the imagination by evolutionary thought and a sense that a humanistic conception of man is not inconsistent with a scientific perspective."⁸ When seen from this point of view, Jack London's short fiction reflects the naturalist's growing sense of frustration as the systems that captivated him--from Marxian socialism to Jungian psychology--failed to give a life-sustaining vision. Consequently, McClintock concludes that

The fascination of Jack London's short stories is not, as is too often argued, the product of a robust celebration of turn of the century popular values. The fascination is born of Jack London's ability to use his craft to capture the struggle between the most fundamentally human desire for salvation and the most fundamentally human fear of damnation.⁹

While Labor and McClintock are leaders in the field of serious London scholarship, they, as well as other critics, have explored only the fringes of the most outlying region of London's fictive world--the South Pacific. Jack London as social revolutionary and Jack London as the "Kipling of the Klondike" have received increasingly detailed examination, but with the exception of McClintock's chapter on Jungian influence in London's last tales of

Hawaii and some perceptive comments by Labor in his chapter entitled "The Symbolic Wilderness," scant detailed analysis of these narratives is available. This is a serious omission. In two novels Adventure and Jerry of the Islands, in a travel book The Cruise of the Snark, and in four complete short story collections South Sea Tales, The House of Pride, A Son of the Sun, and On the Makaloa Mat, as well as in miscellaneous short stories and articles, this most prolific of American naturalists¹⁰ drew upon the personal experiences of his wanderings through Polynesia and Melanesia (1907-1909) to extend his literary landscape.

This study's focus is upon the distinctive themes and motifs of these South Sea narratives which set them apart from the rest of London's canon. However, if one is to see these works in proper perspective, a summary of the genesis of the author's Pacific cruise is first needed.

By 1905 Jack London had published ten books, including The Call of the Wild, The Sea-Wolf, and the three excellent volumes of Northland stories The Son of the Wolf, The God of His Fathers, and Children of the Frost. Consequently, he was firmly established as the literary representative of the strenuous life in America, a position comparable to Theodore Roosevelt's in the political realm.

And it was at this point in his career that he happened to read Captain Joshua Slocum's autobiographical Sailing Alone Around the World. Having been a salt water sailor since his teen-age years and possessing a psyche that reveled in tests of courage and physical prowess, London became obsessed with the notion of building his own small sailing ship and, with a handful of friends, circumnavigating the globe. As he stated in the "Foreword" to The Cruise of the Snark:

The things I like constitute my set of values. The thing I like most of all is personal achievement--not achievement for the world's applause, but achievement for my own delight. It is the old "I did it! I did it! With my own hands I did it!" But personal achievement with me must be concrete. I'd rather win a water-fight in the swimming pool, or remain astride a horse that is trying to get out from under me, than write the great American novel. Each man to his liking.¹¹

After numerous delays caused by a myriad of problems,¹² London, his second wife, Charmian, and a crew of four set sail from Oakland, California, on April 23, 1907. An around-the-world cruise is by definition ambitious. But in this instance even this designation is an understatement. In a letter to one of his magazine editors, London mapped his course in these words:

From Hawaii, we shall wander through the South Seas, Samoa, Tasmania, New Zealand, Australia,

New Guinea, and up through the Philippines to Japan. Then Korea, and China, and on down to India, Red Sea, Mediterranean, Black Sea, Baltic, and on across the Atlantic to New York, and then around the Horn to San Francisco. . . . If the whim strikes us, we'll go off to a thousand different and remote places that no tourist ever heard of. If it takes a dozen years . . . , well and good. You can take a look at the map and get an idea of the different countries we shall stop at along the way, as well as of many additional places we are likely to visit. For instance, if it is possible . . . we shall spend several months on the Grand Canal and the great rivers of China. We shall certainly put in a winter at St. Petersburg, and another in the South of Italy. If it is possible, we shall go up the Danube from the Black Sea to Vienna. . . . There is no reason at all why we should not . . . come up the Seine to Paris, and moor alongside the Latin Quarter with a bow-line out to Notre Dame and a stern-line fast to the Morgue.¹³

Jack London's cruise plans, like most of his dreams, were grandiose and destined to failure. But he gave the enterprise his best effort by sailing to Hawaii, although he had to learn navigation in mid-ocean, then on to the Marquesas, the Society group, Samoa, Fiji, the Solomons and other islands before a variety of tropical ailments--yaws, malaria, dysentery, biblical leprosy--and the unseaworthiness of his ketch, the Snark, named for Lewis Carroll's imaginary beast in The Hunting of the Snark, forced a termination of the voyage. After more than six months of convalescence in Australia, London and Charmian returned to California on a tramp steamer by way of Ecuador, Panama,

and New Orleans. July, 1909, found him once again on his Glen Ellen ranch--the Snark adventure ended.

In many respects, it was miraculous that London was able to accomplish as much as he did, for the forty-three-foot Snark, into which the author had poured over thirty-five thousand dollars (five times the price of any of a number of good yachts available in the San Francisco Bay area), was, in his **own** words, "a sieve" and a nautical nightmare, which refused to heave to in stormy seas. When prior to departure many expressed doubts that the Londons would ever be seen again, Ambrose Bierce, one of the writer's literary antagonists, reassured the public that London would be back--"the ocean would never accept a ship like that."

And return he did, having lived many of the adventures he was to record in his South Sea narratives.¹⁴ As noted previously, London's life has vied with his own literary achievements for the attention of his reading audience, and the Snark adventures have been of particular interest. They have been recounted by his chief biographers as well as by London himself in The Cruise of the Snark (1911), a work of considerable artistic merit, by Charmian London in The Log of the Snark (1915) and Our Hawaii (1917), by Martin Johnson, a member of the Snark's crew who later gained fame as an African hunter and

adventurer, in Through the South Seas With Jack London (1913), and by A. Grove Day in Jack London and the South Seas (1972). While The Cruise of the Snark is the first of London's South Pacific narratives to be analyzed in this study, the biographical aspects of this odyssey are of concern herein only so far as they relate to its literary products. Therefore, if the reader is interested in the details of the cruise, the above works should be consulted.

The hallmark of the Jack London canon is its variety, and his South Sea narratives (a total of thirty-eight publications ranging from essays to novels) exhibit his typical diversity. There are simple adventure stories in the potboiler tradition, such as "The Mission of John Starhurst" (1907) and "The Goat Man of Fuatino" (1911); there are dramatizations of the inevitable clash of cultures, Polynesian and Anglo-Saxon, in such tales as "The House of Pride" (1910) and "On the Makaloa Mat" (1919); there are the first realistic presentations of the subject of leprosy by an American author in The Cruise of the Snark and in such Hawaiian stories as "The Sheriff of Kona" (1909) and "Good-bye, Jack" (1910); there are grim naturalistic accounts of struggle for survival in the black hell of Melanesia, as in "Mauki" (1909) and Adventure (1911); there are ironically qualified

defenses of white imperialism in "The Inevitable White Man" (1910) and The Cruise of the Snark, while such stories as "The Chinago" (1909) and "Koolau the Leper" (1909) are clearly critical of the white man's rule; and, finally, in the last stories of his career, there are archetypal-psychological themes and motifs, most notably in "The Water Baby" (1918), "Shin Bones" (1918), and "The Bones of Kahekili" (1919), which reflect London's reading of Carl Jung's Psychology of the Unconscious.

This study deals exclusively with Jack London's South Sea literature, for within the confines of this relatively unexplored region of his work are to be found fiction and nonfiction of merit as well as the themes which relate this protean writer to the intellectual ferment of early twentieth-century America. As Fred Lewis Pattee noted in The Development of the American Short Story (1923): "to understand the opening years of the new century one must study Jack Londonism." This comment is not an overstatement; for while noting London's limitations as an artist--and they are at times most glaring--the student of American literature must also recognize him as an intellectual barometer of his time. Rugged individualist, materialist and monist, romantic quester, bard of the blond beast and Nietzschean superman, avowed socialist,

advocate of revolutionary change, and defender of white imperialism, he was at best fascinatingly paradoxical, while often simply contradictory.

The final and most significant justification for this study is that the dominant themes and motifs which inform Jack London's South Sea narratives often differ either in degree or kind from those found in the author's more famous Northland fiction and suggest that he has been unfairly dismissed as a writer of Alaskan "dog stories."

Because London's essays, short stories, and novels of the South Pacific are numerous and in some cases thematically redundant and/or of lesser artistic merit, a work-by-work analysis in the reader's guide tradition has not been attempted; rather representative narratives are used as illustrative material in discussions of the following aspects of the author's South Sea works: first, his distinctive blending of the romantic, realistic, and naturalistic modes (reflected in his obsession with the test motif and in his use of the ironic pattern of anticipation and disillusionment); second, his utilization of violence in dramatizing his dominant concern, survival of the fittest, the recurring feature of his work which most clearly binds him to the naturalistic tradition. Third and closely related to these topics are London's attitudes toward race which give form to many of his South Sea

stories. His paradoxically contrasting visions of "natural man"--Polynesian and Melanesian, god and devil, respectively--and the marked influence upon the author of British sociologist Benjamin Kidd's theories regarding the "natural" conquest of the tropics by the white race are of primary importance. Also coupled with these racist-imperialist concepts is the writer's use of irony to reveal his own ambivalent attitude toward the inevitable consequences of such theories in practice and to undercut his "philosophical" base. Finally, an analysis of the influence of Jungian psychology on London's last tales of Hawaii, stories in which he dramatizes his struggle to achieve some belief beyond pessimistic determinism, brings this study to its conclusion.

The South Seas have long held a fascination for civilized man, and for the artist in particular. Jack London was only one of many--Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, Joseph Conrad, Paul Gauguin, Rupert Brooke, Somerset Maugham, James Michener--who have responded to its call. This study of the writer's treatment of this region is intended as a useful contribution to the field of London scholarship.

NOTES

¹ Earle Labor, "Jack London, 1876-1916: A Centennial Recognition," Modern Fiction Studies, 22, No. 1 (Spring 1976), 3.

² Joan R. Sherman, Jack London: A Reference Guide (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1977), p. x. For a detailed discussion of the evolution of London criticism, consult pp. viii-xviii in this work.

³ Quoted by Mark Schorer, Sinclair Lewis: An American Life (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1961), p. 166.

⁴ Schorer, pp. 165-166.

⁵ Earle Labor, Jack London (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974), p. 150.

⁶ Quoted by Labor, p. 21.

⁷ James I. McClintock, White Logic: Jack London's Short Stories (Cedar Springs, Michigan: Wolf House Books, 1976), p. 30.

⁸ McClintock, p. 54.

⁹ McClintock, p. 174.

¹⁰ In seventeen years of literary productivity (1899-1916), Jack London produced fifty-three books and literally hundreds of separately published journalistic items.

¹¹ Jack London, The Cruise of the Snark, 1st ed. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1911; rpt. London: Seafarer Books, The Merlin Press Ltd., 1971), p. 3.

¹² See "Chapter II: The Inconceivable and Monstrous" in The Cruise of the Snark.

¹³ "To Hayden Carruth," 8 April 1906, Letters from Jack London, eds. King Hendricks and Irving Shepard (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1965), pp. 200-201.

14 "Jack had created the image of the heroic macho writer, who lived his fiction and made a fiction his living. He behaved like the Great American Novelist, even if he had not written the Great American Novel. Those who followed his self-dramatizing style of existence and his short, jerky, bald method of writing, such as Ernest Hemingway, forgot to acknowledge the inventor of the mode, which had more to do with Jack London's Alaska than the Paris of Gertrude Stein."

Andrew Sinclair, Jack (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 248.

CHAPTER II

THE AUTHOR AS HERO:

JACK LONDON'S THE CRUISE OF THE SNARK

"Every creative writer worth our consideration . . . is a victim: a man given over to an obsession."

--Graham Greene

"The naturalist takes no note of common people. . . ."

--Frank Norris

"It is good to ride the tempest and feel godlike."

--Jack London

Jack London's South Pacific is a typhoon-ravaged paradise. The chaos, contradictions, and conflicts that tormented its creator often churn its waters, devastate its islands, and decimate its inhabitants. If one is to navigate these seas, a helmsman with local knowledge is required. Consequently, The Cruise of the Snark, London's autobiographical travel narrative, is the logical work with which to begin. It is important both as a source of factual information regarding this exotic last frontier and, more significantly, as an introduction to those themes and motifs of the author's South Sea fiction which demonstrate his distinctive blending of romantic, realistic, and naturalistic elements.

Although modern critics consider him a mainstream naturalist, Jack London termed himself a realist.¹ He viewed man as circumscribed by powerful hereditary and environmental forces, and he was emphatic in his rejection of a dualistic universe. In a letter to Ralph Kasper, dated June 25, 1914, London made explicit his belief that there was no spiritual reality, that the material world was all:

I have always inclined toward Haeckel's position. In fact, "incline" is too weak a word. I am a hopeless materialist. I see the soul as nothing else than the sum of the activities of the organism, plus personal habits, memories, and experiences of the organism. I believe that when I am dead, I am dead. I believe that with my death I am just as much obliterated as the last mosquito you or I smashed.

This statement of philosophical naturalism with its pessimistic evaluation of human destiny is typical of dozens that can be gleaned from London's letters and essays. And since it is a truism of London scholarship that the author strove to dramatize his "ideas" through his fiction, one might assume that London's South Sea stories and novels dramatize a necessitarian ideology, probably through documentary slice-of-life technique. One also expects to find the tenets of the realistic mode adhered to with some fidelity, especially verisimilitude of detail, an emphasis on "the norm of experience," i.e., "the representative

rather than the exceptional in plot, setting, and character," and an effort by the writer to "achieve objectivity, rather than a subjective or idealistic view of human nature and experience."³ However, this is seldom the case in any of Jack London's fictive realms, and never so in the South Sea narratives. For in his utilization of the exotic and the unusual in setting, plot, and action and in his creation of powerful, idealized protagonists whose struggles in a hostile universe are sympathetically treated, London blended traditionally romantic elements with aspects of realism (his verisimilitude of detail) and naturalism (his deterministic bias).⁴

In his essay "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," Frank Norris, the prototypical American naturalist whose work London admired, argued that to tell the truth the writer must create "the kind of fiction that takes cognizance of the variations from the type of normal life."⁵ How was one to probe the mysteries of man in a "drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of a walk down the block, the excitement of an afternoon call, the adventure of an invitation to dinner"?⁶ Two years later, in the most explicit statement of his literary theory "The Terrible and Tragic in Fiction," London echoed his contemporary:

Can the sweet commonplaces of life be made into anything else than sweetly commonplace stories?

It would not seem so. The great short stories in the world's literary treasure-house seem all to depend upon the tragic and the terrible for their strength and greatness.

. . . Stress and strain are required to sound the deeps of nature, and there is neither stress nor strain in⁷ sweet, optimistic, and placidly happy events.

Realism "in the Howellsian sense of the 'average' or the 'common place' which were hateful words to London"⁸ was anathema because it failed to strike through the mask of appearance. Conversely, American romanticism, particularly in its anti-Emersonian or Melvillian vision,⁹ was congenial to London's temperament. He too believed that literature must confront and attempt to answer the ultimate questions regarding human destiny, and with Melville he held that only in the arena of the terrible and tragic could these issues be clearly defined. Therefore, London advocated the use of subject matter that had been traditionally the domain of romantic fiction.

In practice the author followed his theory. His narratives are set in the frozen wastes of the Northland, in the slums of London's East End, on the blood-washed deck of a North Pacific schooner, in the hobo jungles of fin de siècle America, in prisons, in futuristic societies ravaged by social revolution or biological plague, on the bridge of a ship torn by mutiny--or in the islands

of the South Pacific. In such worlds both readers and fictional characters find themselves "twisted from the ordinary, wrenched from the quiet, uneventful round of everyday life and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and sudden death."¹⁰ Echoes of Jacobean tragedy and Gothicism resound through London's tales and demonstrate that his antipathy for the ordinary lead to his creation of a realism of the uncommon which affirms his ties to the romantic tradition.

As mentioned previously, the second aspect of Jack London's work that exhibits romantic tendencies is his treatment of character. Time after time the author through tone and overt comment clearly empathizes with the dominant individual or with the unconquerable spirit of the underdog who, in Hemingway's phrase, can be "destroyed but not defeated." It is another curious paradox of London's fiction that the individual so carelessly dismissed in theoretical discussion--"a bit of pulsating, jelly-like life"¹¹--takes on stature and significance in his novels and stories. While no naturalist strictly adhered to the tenet of detached objectivity advocated in Zola's Le Roman Expérimental, London, more than most, refrained from taking an objective or amoral view of the struggles of his protagonists who according to handbook definitions

of naturalistic doctrine are merely sophisticated animals. His representative heroes of the South Sea tales--Koolau the Leper, the Chinago, David Grief, John Lakana--possess self-knowledge, a recognition of their fate, and a personal sense of integrity and courage; therefore, the writer, as well as his audience, cannot dismiss them as brutes or mere "human animals." Although often criticized for his lapses in characterization, London strove with some success to create protagonists who, regardless of social status, are individualized and whose worth the reader is urged to recognize.

Like most naturalists, Jack London employed irony, often in a heavy-handed fashion, but seldom at the expense of his heroes. A partial explanation of his attitude toward his protagonists is found in the Horatio Alger aspects of the author's own life. By physical, intellectual, and artistic prowess, London was able to raise himself from the social pit of illegitimacy and poverty. This rise to success, which London believed to be totally his own accomplishment, helped turn him into what Earle Labor has described as a "blatant Romantic and an arrogant inner-directed egotist with a profound faith in his own resources, who lived life as if it were 'an absolute personal experiment.'"¹² If such self-confidence be a contradiction when one grants the writer his deterministic universe,

so be it. But, as Donald Pizer claims, London was part of a strong American tradition:

One of the most striking common denominators in otherwise often diverse interpretations of the American mind is that of romantic individualism--that is, a pervasive and widespread faith in the validity of the individual experience and mind as a source of knowledge and a guide to action. It is true, of course, that this romantic individualism has never lacked criticism. But its tenacious strength in spite of frequent valid and forceful attack is itself an indication of the depth of the faith in the individual in American life, whether it be expressed in Jeffersonian liberalism, transcendentalism,¹³ or the literary revolt of the twenties.

Based on his personal experience and temperament, Jack London was a romantic individualist; yet the "books"--Spencer's, Marx's, Darwin's--had brought him to an intellectual commitment to determinism. The consequent conflict helps explain the recurring character type in his fictive realm: the strong man alone against the world. His obsession with this figure found expression in his most successful works which implicitly argued that "there is no fundamental mutual exclusiveness between modern romanticism and the modern view of a causative naturalistic universe."¹⁴

Andrew Sinclair has suggested that London's entire career was an acting out of this role of rugged individualist with the Snark cruise, taken in the face of such

overwhelming odds, merely the "hazarding [of] his own life and the lives of his crew to satisfy an image of himself as master of his own ketch and dream. . . ." ¹⁵ The Cruise of the Snark illustrates that "for London the living and writing became almost one. . . ." ¹⁶ In this work he did not have to create an alter ego; the adventure was his and he recorded it as he lived it. Consequently, the themes and motifs found in this narrative are particularly significant for they arose from his quintessential self and became the foundation for his subsequent stories and novels of the South Seas. Those to be noted and analyzed in detail are the most pervasive--the ironic motif of anticipation and disillusionment, the theme of the testing of the individual against the various manifestations of a hostile universe, and an emphasis upon race and racial characteristics.

The Snark articles, from which the book grew, were conceived as a practical means of partially supporting the tremendous financial burden of the world cruise, and London contracted with The Cosmopolitan to supply the magazine with "a series of exclusive articles descriptive of my voyage in my sailboat," ¹⁷ at the rate of ten cents per word. Shortly thereafter he struck a bargain with Woman's Home Companion to supply it with "articles describing home-life amongst the different peoples" he was to encounter. That

such arrangements might cause problems is obvious, and now began a three-way controversy with each magazine advertising that it was "sending" Jack London on his cruise and accusing the author and each other of duplicity.

Through the summer, fall, and winter of 1906, London was inundated with problems of construction that forced continual delays in the launching of the Snark; simultaneously he fought an epistolary battle with the feuding magazines. The letters he sent to each were, to say the least, scathing. The following excerpt from a letter to the editor of The Cosmopolitan is typical:

Magazine editors are all the same. I have made a practice of not noticing their misdeeds against me; but now that you jump me for the misdeeds of one of your brethren . . . , why I'm going to jump back. Don't you think I've got a kick coming for the way you have advertised me as going around the world for The Cosmopolitan? Going around the world for The Cosmopolitan--hell! Everybody thinks The Cosmopolitan is building my boat for me, and paying my expenses, and giving me a princely salary on top of it,--and this impression by your manner of advertising you have spread broadcast, all on the foundation of your miserable guaranteed 35,000 words that you have agreed to take from me.¹⁹

Finally, when the Christmas, 1906, number of The Cosmopolitan appeared, London angrily took exception to the editorial cutting of the article which now serves as the "Foreword" to The Cruise of the Snark. His reaction

was in sharp contrast to that of a money-hungry writer lacking in artistic integrity.

Who the dickens are you . . . to think that you can better my work! Don't you see my point? If the whole woven thing--event, narrative, description-- is not suitable for your magazine, why cut it out--cut out the whole thing. I don't care. But I refuse to contemplate for one moment that there is any man in your office . . . capable of bettering my art, or the art of any other first-class professional writer.

Now I want to give warning right here: I won't stand for it. Before I'll stand for it, I'll throw over the whole proposition. If you dare to do it with my succeeding articles . . . I'll not send you another line. . . . Do you think for one moment that I'll write my heart (my skilled, professional heart, if you please) into my work to have you fellows slaughtering it to suit your journalistic tastes? Either I'm going to write this set of articles, or you're going to write it, for know right here that I refuse definitely and flatly, to collaborate with you or with anyone in your office.²⁰

No subsequent articles were published in The Cosmopolitan. By mutual consent the contract was terminated and the following Snark essays appeared in a number of magazines between 1907 and 1910--principally Woman's Home Companion, Harper's Weekly, and Pacific Monthly. Yet, curiously, to this day many knowledgeable scholars erroneously refer to The Cruise of the Snark as a collection of articles written for The Cosmopolitan.

It is remarkable that a work begun with such brouhaha, conceived in segments with apparently less conscious

concern for overall organization than a picaresque novel, and written at sea or upon tropical islands as the author strove to keep boat and crew together and afloat should be as unified and artistically successful as it is. The explanations for this achievement are several. The most obvious is London's ability to bring the reader into the adventure of the Pacific traverse, whose romantic quest motif is, in itself, a unifying element. The self-image which the writer conveys is one with which the reader willingly identifies--that of the intelligent adventurer, the man of action and self-knowledge, willing to test himself against the elements while acknowledging, with ironic detachment, his own weakness and fallibility. From the opening description of the struggles and frustrations of building the Snark to the final chapter's record of the author's battles against debilitating tropical maladies, London's popular appeal in its purest form is evident. Such experiences as the learning of navigation as the Snark gropes toward the Hawaiian Islands; the mastering of "the royal sport," surfing at Waikiki; a visit to the dreaded Leper colony on Molokai; a horseback climb up magnificent Haleakala, "the House of the Sun," and back down along the dangerous Nahiku Ditch Trail; the "impossible" traverse from Hawaii to the Marquesas; and a recruiting voyage for plantation labor along the coast of

Malaita, the most savage of the Solomons, possess a common denominator--the author's obsession with measuring his ability to meet the forces of nature and man arrayed against him. Like the speaker in Stephen Crane's poem, Jack London strove to force the universe to recognize him. "Sir, I exist!" is the statement embodied in his every action. That there be no mistaking this purpose, the "Foreword" to The Cruise of the Snark is explicit:

In the maze and chaos of the conflict of . . . vast and draughty Titans, it is for me to thread my precarious way. The bit of life that is I will exult over them. The bit of life that is I . . . will imagine that it is godlike. It is good to ride the tempest and feel godlike.

Here is the sea, the wind, and the wave. . . . Here is ferocious environment. And here is difficult adjustment, the achievement of which is delight to the small quivering vanity that is I.²¹

"Chapter IV: Finding One's Way About," which appeared as an essay in Harper's Weekly, August 1, 1908, is the first example of London's "successful adjustment"²² and introduces this thematic test motif which runs throughout the narrative. A comic tone pervades this chapter as the author possesses sufficient self-confidence and sense of achievement to laugh at himself and the "mystery" of navigation by sun and stars.

Roscoe Eames, Charmian London's aged uncle, was designated the Snark's navigator, but, as London relates, Eames "was a San Francisco Bay yachtsman, where land is always only several miles away and the art of navigation is never employed."²³ In reality, he could not navigate, although he and the other members of the crew, the author included, were initially convinced of his miraculous abilities:

He stood in reverential awe of himself. . . . The act of finding himself on the face of the waters became a rite, and he felt himself a superior being to the rest of us who knew not this rite and were dependent on him for being shepherded across the heaving and limitless waste, the briny highroad that connects the continents and whereon there are no mile-stones. So, with the sextant he made obeisance to the sun-god, he consulted ancient tomes and tables of magic characters, muttered prayers in a strange tongue that sounded like Indexerror-parallaxrefraction, made cabalistic signs on paper, added and carried one, and then, on a piece of holy script called the Grail--I mean, the Chart--he placed his finger on a certain space conspicuous for its blankness and said, "Here we are." When we looked at the blank space and asked, "And where is that?" he answered in the cipher-code of the higher priesthood, "31--15--47 north, 133--5--30 west." And we said "Oh," and felt mighty small.²⁴

There was a touch of Gilbert and Sullivan to these opening days of the cruise. The poorly constructed Snark was leaking and its auxiliary gasoline engine failed to function as Eames continued to record the ship's "erratic jumps" across the chart. Soon London realized that

something was seriously amiss and that he himself would have to navigate. "And right there Roscoe crashed, and he was high priest of the Snark no longer. I invaded the sanctuary and demanded the ancient tomes and magic tables, also the prayer-wheel--the sextant, I mean."²⁵ Aided by his prodigious ability to absorb knowledge quickly, somewhere between California and Hawaii, London wrestled with the books, tables, charts, and instruments of navigation until he could proclaim:

I had exploded the mystery; and yet, such was the miracle of it, I was conscious of new power in me, and I felt the thrill and tickle of pride. And when Martin [Johnson] asked me, in the same humble and respectful way I had previously asked Roscoe, as to where we were, it was with exaltation and spiritual chest-throwing that I answered in the cipher-code of the higher priesthood and heard Martin's self-abasing and worshipful "Oh." . . .

I couldn't help it. I tell it as a vindication of Roscoe and all other navigators. The poison of power was working in me.²⁶

The self-deprecating humor of this passage belies the symbolic import of London's mastery of navigation. His whole career was a quest for "the answers," an attempt to map a course that would lead to an explanation of the human predicament. His goal was always the same--to break the code of the "higher priesthood," to point to a spot on the map and say here we are and there is where we are going.

In the ultimate quest he was unsuccessful--his biography is a record of failed gods--but while on the Snark he was able to play the role of triumphant hero in a naturalistic universe.²⁷ The chapter concludes with Snark's on-schedule sighting of the summit of Haleakala, the Hawaiian Islands' famous volcanic peak. With ironic understatement, London announces what he hopes is the first in a long series of triumphs: "We'll be in Honolulu tomorrow. Our navigation is all right."²⁸

The four following chapters deal with the Londons' Hawaiian experiences. The first that requires consideration is "Chapter VI: A Royal Sport," published in Woman's Home Companion, October, 1907. It is significant in two respects. First, it presents the reader with another dramatic example of the motif of fragile man versus his environment. London finds in the sport of surfing the same allure as the mastering of navigation offered--the chance to test himself. And, secondly, this chapter contains an excellent example of the author's ability to blend subjective romantic description (that of the surfer riding the waves) with coolly objective, scientific discussion of natural phenomena (the physics of a wave). The author's handling of these two paradoxical aspects of his vision of reality conveys the essence of his romantic naturalism.

London's opening description of the scene and his analysis of his feelings as he sits on the shores of Waikiki and watches its monster waves come in set the tone for the chapter:

Half a mile out, where is the reef, the white-headed combers thrust suddenly skyward out of the placid turquoise-blue and come rolling in to shore. One after another they come, a mile long, with smoking crests, the white battalions of the infinite army of the sea. And one sits and listens to the perpetual roar, and watches the unending procession, and feels tiny and fragile before this tremendous force expressing itself in fury and foam and sound. Indeed, one feels microscopically small, and the thought that one may wrestle with this sea raises in one's imagination a thrill of apprehension, almost of fear.²⁹

As London contemplates this manifestation of nature's might, suddenly a human form materializes within its tumult. "Where but the moment before was only the wide desolation and invincible roar, is now a man, erect, full-statured, not struggling frantically in that wild movement, not buried and crushed and buffeted by those mighty monsters, but standing above them all, calm and superb, poised on the giddy summit, his feet buried in the churning foam, the salt smoke rising to his knees, and he is flying as fast as the surge on which he stands."³⁰ In what for London was an epiphany, the Hawaiian surfer, like a Polynesian personification of a Greek god, a "brown Mercury,"

comes shoreward. He is the master of his environment, "standing above" the waves, "calm" and "superb." As stated previously, London's obsession was the vision of the strong man in control of his destiny; and here in this interaction of man and nature it comes alive before him. The Kanaka surfer is the author's idealized man "riding the sea that roars and bellows and cannot shake him from its back."³¹

London, as a member of the "kingly species," is convinced that he too can master the art. But abruptly the mood and direction of the passage shift completely. Jack London the romantic adventurer is replaced by his alter ego, the detached scientist, as narrator. And for the next few pages the reader is treated to a dissertation on the physics of waves.

The face of the wave may be only six feet, yet you can slide down it a quarter of a mile, or half mile, and not reach bottom. For, see, since a wave is only a communicated agitation or impetus, and since the water that composes a wave is changing every instant, new water is rising into the wave as fast as the wave travels. You slide down this new water, and yet remain in your old position on the wave, sliding down the still newer water that is rising and forming the wave. You slide precisely as fast as the wave travels. . . . If you still cherish the notion, while sliding, that the water is moving with you, thrust your arms into it and attempt to paddle; you will find that you have to be remarkably quick to get a stroke, for the water is dropping astern just as fast as you are rushing ahead.³²

As C. C. Walcutt has commented, passages such as this are a distinguishing feature of London's appeal for "he involves the reader in an intellectual adventure that is just difficult enough to keep him alert with the effort to understand. The rush of thought is of a piece with the rush of discovery and adventure; here it surges along with the foaming racing sea."³³

This juxtaposition of the description of the surfer and the analysis of wave motion exhibits the flexibility and diversity of the author's prose. While his ability to convey violent action successfully has been recognized, his other stylistic skill, the talent to "evoke sharp images, explain complex procedures," and "describe intricate mechanisms and processes with economy and clarity"³⁴ has been generally overlooked.

London goes on to relate in detail his surfing tutelage. And as the chapter draws to a conclusion, one is led to expect a dramatic description of the author's mastery of the sport, perhaps the conquest of Waikiki's biggest wave; however, as will be the case in incident after incident in the Snark narrative, London undercuts the reader's expectations. The "insidious, deceitful" Hawaiian sun blisters his fair skin, and instead of rising from the sea like a white god, he is forced to a painful exile in his bungalow. Probably there was a smile on

London's face as he wrote the chapter's last sentence:

"Upon one thing I am resolved: the Snark shall not sail from Honolulu until I, too, wing my heels with the swiftness of the sea, and become a sun-burned, skin-peeling Mercury."³⁵ In a light vein the writer has reminded his readers of his recognition of his vincibility and has introduced the physical weakness which will ultimately force him to end the cruise--his inability to handle the effects of the tropical sun.³⁶

"Chapter VII: The Lepers of Molokai," which appeared in the January, 1908, issue of Woman's Home Companion, was of such importance that alone it justified the Snark cruise. For the first time an American writer with a large audience spoke out to debunk the lurid myths of horror and degradation that enshrouded leprosy and its treatment on the Hawaiian island of Molokai. London admitted that prior to his visit to the colony he envisioned Molokai to be "the pit of hell, the most cursed place on earth."³⁷ Therefore, since he held that the terrible and the tragic were the only valid subject matter for serious fiction, since he believed that one must experience as much as possible if he were to write truly, and since he viewed the fear of leprosy as another challenge by which man might test himself, London readily accepted an invitation from the medical authorities to

visit the colony and see for himself. What he saw destroyed his misconceptions, and he published the truth in fulfillment of the request of one of the lepers:

Give us a good breeze about how we live here.
For heaven's sake write us up straight. Put
your foot down on the chamber-of-horrors rot
and all the rest of it. We don't like being
misrepresented. We've got some feelings.
Just tell the world how we really are in
here.³⁸

In simple, objective, direct prose Jack London "wrote them up straight." To prove that the popularized vision of the leper did not reflect the realities of Molokai, he described his and Charmian's experiences among the patients and staff, whose living conditions and close associations were recorded in detail. He related such incidents as his participation in a shoot of the Kalau-papa Rifle Club in which he used the weapons of the lepers. And he presented accurately the medical facts regarding Hansen's disease and its treatment. "The chief horror of leprosy," he wrote, "obtains in the minds of those who do not know anything about the disease."³⁹ While London did not gloss over the gravity of the disease or its terrible aspects, he made his point effectively:

I would by far prefer to spend the rest of my days in Molokai than in any tuberculosis sanitarium. . . . For that matter, if it were

given me to choose between being compelled to live in Molokai for the rest of my life, or in the East End of London, or the Stockyards of Chicago, I would select Molokai without debate.⁴⁰

The chapter concludes with the author's projection of the future elimination of the disease: "Once an efficacious serum is discovered . . . leprosy, because it is so feebly contagious, will pass away swiftly from the earth. The battle with it will be short and sharp."⁴¹ The language of conflict and the basic idea that through action based on knowledge victory would be obtained are emblematic of London's whole approach to life. In this case leprosy is merely another manifestation of that harsh and indifferent universe with which man struggles.⁴²

The last of the Hawaiian episodes is "Chapter VIII: The House of the Sun," published in the Pacific Monthly, January, 1910. This chapter relates London's horseback excursion to the crater atop Haleakala, the Hawaiian Islands' most majestic volcanic peak, whose name translates as "House of the Sun." Because it was off the beaten track and spectacular in its grandeur, Haleakala appealed to London's temperament. His description of the crater's floor possesses that atavistic ambience which he reveled in and fully expressed in such works as Before Adam.

It was a scene of vast bleakness and desolation, stern, forbidding, fascinating. We gazed down upon a place of fire and earthquake. The tie-ribs of earth lay bare before us. It was a workshop of nature still cluttered with the raw beginnings of world-making.⁴³

As London naturally turned to the metaphor of battle to describe the waves of Waikiki and to forecast the destruction of leprosy so, once again, he resorted to the language of violence to describe the collision of Ukiukiu and Naulu, the trade-winds whose accompanying clouds clash as armies on the slopes of the House of the Sun. In a most effective Homeric simile, which extends for two and a half pages, this "mighty battle of the clouds" is dramatized. A short excerpt suffices to convey its tone:

It is on the western slopes of Haleakala that the main battle goes on. Here Naulu masses his heaviest formations and wins his greatest victories. Ukiukiu grows weak toward late afternoon . . . and is driven back by Naulu. Naulu's generalship is excellent. All day he has been gathering and packing away immense reserves. As the afternoon draws on, he welds them into a solid column, sharp-pointed, miles in length, a mile in width, and hundreds of feet thick. This column he slowly thrusts forward into the broad battlefront of Ukiukiu, and slowly and surely Ukiukiu, weakening fast, is split asunder. . . . At times Ukiukiu struggles wildly, and with fresh accessions of strength from the limitless northeast, smashes away half a mile at a time of Naulu's column and sweeps it off and away toward West Maui. Sometimes, when the two charging armies meet end-on, a tremendous perpendicular whirl results, the cloud-masses, locked together, mounting

thousands of feet into the air. . . . And all the while the ragged little skirmishers, stray and detached, sneak through the trees and canyons, crawl along and through the grass, and surprise one another with unexpected leaps and rushed; while above, far away, serene and lonely in the rays of the setting sun, Haleakala looks down upon the conflict.⁴⁴

This passage, with its stylistic echoes of a military historian of the Second Empire Salon School "painting" an Austerlitz or Waterloo, reflects the naturalist's penchant for viewing all nature in terms of violent struggle. For most viewers this scene would be regarded as majestic but certainly benign. For Jack London nature is "red in fang and claw."⁴⁵

Subsequent to the battle simile, London retells an Hawaiian myth of the demigod Maui, a story of great symbolic significance for him. With his feet firmly planted on Haleakala, Maui roped the sun's beams and forced the sun to slow down in its journey through the sky; thereby Maui extended the day and allowed mankind (herein represented by Maui's mother) more time to complete the day's labors. This symbolic portrayal of the individual's triumph over nature, London's "sternly exacting environment," is another example of this motif and is clearly related to the countless other incidents of individual achievement which the author records in the course of the narrative.

On October 7, 1907, the Snark sailed from Hilo, Hawaii; its destination was Nuka-hiva, in the Marquesas, which was reached on December 6, 1907. This segment of the Snark adventure most pleased the author, and he recorded it in glowing detail in "Chapter IX: A Pacific Traverse," published in Pacific Monthly, February, 1910.

Significantly, London prefaces the chapter with the following quotation from the Sailing Directory: "Sandwich Island to Tahiti.--There is great difficulty in making passage across the trades. The whalers and all others speak with great doubt of fetching Tahiti from the Sandwich Islands."⁴⁶ He then notes that the Hawaii to the Marquesas traverse is not mentioned in the Directory because it is even more difficult to negotiate. This was the open challenge that the author sought--and he met and conquered it. Although only two thousand miles by direct line, the journey of the Snark covered four thousand miles. They sailed far to the east attempting to catch the correct currents and trade-winds, only to languish for weeks in the Doldrums;⁴⁷ "the world faded until at last there ceased to be any world except the little world of the Snark, freighted with her seven souls and floating on the expanse of the waters."⁴⁸ In such Conradian passages London recorded the adventure:

In years and years no sailing vessel has attempted the traverse, and we found ourselves in the midst of one of the loneliest of the Pacific solitudes. In the sixty days we were crossing it we sighted no sail, lifted no steamer's smoke above the horizon. A disabled vessel could drift in the deserted expanse for a dozen generations, and there would be no rescue.⁴⁹

The Snark became a microcosm differing from the larger world in one essential respect: "The affairs of our little world had to be regulated, and, unlike the great world, our world had to be steered in its journey through space."⁵⁰ What is revealing in this sentence is the implicit recognition of the individual's at least partial control of his destiny. The Snark "had to be steered in its journey through space," and London was the helmsman. In this sense, the voyage was for the author, to borrow Robert Frost's phrase, a "momentary stay against confusion." While it was often "rather lonely, there at the wheel, steering a little world through howling blackness,"⁵¹ London was living his dream, feeling godlike, playing the lead as romantic hero in a naturalistic universe.

Through the twenty pages of this chapter, Jack London's pride of accomplishment permeates every line. The possibly catastrophic loss of half their fresh water is described as "our most exciting event"⁵² and the "sordid and bloody slaughter"⁵³ of flying fish by bonitas, dolphins,

and crewmen alike dramatizes the writer's conception of man's natural position in a world governed by Darwin's law of life.

Finally, at five in the afternoon on that December sixth, Nuka-hiva, the Marquesas Islands, was sighted. What London felt was the finest achievement of his Snark adventure was culminated: "The traverse was accomplished."⁵⁴

Earlier in this chapter it was mentioned that along with the theme of the testing of the individual the ironic motif of anticipation and consequent disillusionment runs as an undercurrent through The Cruise of the Snark. This pattern first surfaces in the narrative's second chapter, "the Inconceivable and Monstrous," (published as "Building of the Boat," Harper's Weekly, July 18, 1908) as London describes the time and money invested to insure that the Snark would be the best of its kind. In particular he concentrates on praising the "beautiful," "dream-like," "wonderful" bow of the still unfinished Snark. Time after time as other aspects of the yawl's construction disappoint him, London comforts himself with a vision of the Snark's bow punching through heavy seas. Then when they set out for Hawaii in full knowledge that "man had betrayed us and sent us to sea in a sieve,"⁵⁵ he discovers that the Snark will not heave to in heavy

weather. Despite a thirty-five-thousand-dollar investment, "[t]hat beautiful bow of hers refused to come up and face the wind."⁵⁶

As noted, "A Royal Sport" also builds toward disillusionment and an undercutting of expectations, even if in a humorous manner, when the author, badly sunburned, retreats to shelter and the promised conquest of the breakers is never achieved.

However, this motif is most successfully employed in "Chapter X: Typee," published in Pacific Monthly, March, 1910. London opens this most interesting episode of the narrative by relating that as a boy he had spent many hours dreaming over Herman Melville's Typee. "Nor was it all dreaming. I resolved there and then . . . come what would, that when I had gained strength and years, I, too, would voyage to Typee."⁵⁷ So that when the traverse was accomplished and London stepped ashore at Taiohae Bay, some part of himself still expected to enter a world of Kory-Korys and Fayaways. But instead of Melville's paradise, he found the dying remnants of a once proud culture. The serpent had entered the Garden:

Of all the inhabitants of the South Seas, the Marquesans were adjudged the strongest and the most beautiful. . . .

And now all this strength and beauty has departed, and the valley of Typee is the abode of some dozen wretched creatures afflicted by

leprosy, elephantiasis, and tuberculosis. . . . Life has rotted away in this wonderful garden spot. . . . Not alone were the Typeans physically magnificent; they were pure. Their air did not contain the bacilli and germs and microbes of disease that fill our own air. And when the white man imported in their ships these various microorganisms of disease, the Typeans crumpled up and went down before them.⁵⁸

What survived were "half-breeds and strange conglomerations of different races," or rather "a wreckage of races at best."⁵⁹

While this discovery was a shock to London the romantic adventurer, London the scientist-sociologist found in it support for his racial theories, particularly the superiority of the white man--a thesis that finds expression in many of the South Sea tales.

When one considers the situation, one is almost driven to the conclusion that the white race flourished on impurity and corruption. Natural selection, however, gives the explanation. We of the white race are the survivors and the descendants of the thousands of generations of survivors in the war with the microorganisms. . . . Only those of us survived who could withstand them. We who are alive are the immune, the fit--the ones best constituted to live in a world of hostile microorganisms. The poor Marquesans had undergone no such selection. They were not immune.⁶⁰

In the light of this analysis, the history of the Marquesans during the past three hundred years is striking

and tends to confirm London's reading of Darwinian-Spencerian theory. The population of the Marquesas Islands, which was more than 120,000 in the late eighteenth century, plummeted to fewer than thirteen hundred in 1936; yet "today the strength of these Polynesians has almost magically returned. The people of greatly mixed blood number nowadays about six thousand."⁶¹

This chapter contains many of London's experiences among the Typeans and concludes with one of those remarkably lyrical passages that demonstrate the quality of his better prose and remind the reader of his Keatsian sensitivity to the intermingling of beauty and mortality, pain and promise, the paradoxes of existence.

The feast ended, we watched the moon rise over Typee. The air was like balm, faintly scented with the breath of flowers. It was a magic night, deathly still, without the slightest breeze to stir the foliage; and one caught one's breath and felt the pang that is almost hurt, so exquisite was the beauty of it. Faint and far could be heard the thin thunder of the surf upon the beach. There were no beds; and we drowsed and slept wherever we thought the floor softest. Near by, a woman panted and moaned in her sleep, and all about us the dying islanders coughed in the night.⁶²

"Typee" demonstrates London's recognition of the vast chasm separating the ideal and the real and extends the motif of anticipation and disillusionment.

"Chapter XI: The Nature Man," published in the September, 1908, issue of Woman's Home Companion, is at first glance an artistically unjustifiable insertion into the work. In its opening pages the author delivers a diatribe against the inhabitants of Tahiti, the Snark's next landfall. "Tahiti," he says, "is one of the most beautiful spots in the world, inhabited by thieves and robbers and liars" and "spidery human vermin. . . ." ⁶³ While in Papeete, Tahiti's main city, London had had an unpleasant disagreement with M. Levy, a leading Jewish businessman of the city, and apparently this colored his perception of the population as a whole. ⁶⁴

If local color writing had been his main purpose, London would have dealt in depth with "romantic" Tahiti, whose native population and environs Paul Gauguin had so recently immortalized on canvas. But instead the author devotes the body of this essay to a character study of Ernest Darling, an eccentric American socialist-hippie, who had made Tahiti his home. A physical weakling beset by numerous ailments and given up for lost by doctors in his native California, Darling had refused to accept such a prognosis and had returned to nature for a cure. London records how this "dying wraith of a man" ⁶⁵ escaped civilization and was miraculously restored to health by the simple procedure of imitating the animals who lived off the

wild fruits and berries of the landscape. A combination of California sanity commissions and cold winters convinced him that the Hawaiian climate was better suited for one with his life style, but Hawaii soon deported him as an undesirable. Finally, he found in Tahiti the garden spot of his hopes. And now in perfect health he roamed the land and waters around Papeete in loincloth and fishnet shirt.

Jack London interrupted the narrative of his own adventures to relate the story of Ernest Darling because he, like the Kanaka surfer and the demigod Maui, came to stand in the writer's mind as a personification of triumphant individualism--"The golden sun-god in the scarlet loin-cloth, standing upright in his tiny outrigger canoe."⁶⁶ Darling was tested and not found wanting. This is merely a variation on that theme which runs through The Cruise of the Snark. While ironically qualifying any assertion with the parallel motif of failure and disillusionment, London continues to express the conviction that despite the harsh realities of existence, marginal salvage is possible--the strong man is capable of winning victories.

As the Snark sailed westward from Tahiti, a lull set in which is reflected in the subsequent three chapters:

"The High Seat of Abundance," "Stone-Fishing of Bora Bora," and "The Amateur Navigator." Because of a paucity of material, it was essential that London fall back on all the reserves of the professional writer. "To sustain creation from almost nothing implies a powerful talent,"⁶⁷ which is amply demonstrated in these essays.

"Chapter XII: The High Seat of Abundance," published in Woman's Home Companion, November, 1908, relates London's impressions of Raiatea, in the Society Group of French Polynesia, and the neighboring island of Tahaa. In particular he emphasizes the natural kindness and hospitality he finds among the uncorrupted natives of Polynesia, represented by Tahei, a Polynesian soon to become a Snark crewman for the duration of the voyage.

Let it suffice for me to say that of all hospitality and entertainment I have known, in no case was theirs not only not excelled, but in no case was it equalled. Perhaps the most delightful feature of it was that it was due to no training, to no complex social ideals, but that it was the untutored and spontaneous outpouring from their hearts.⁶⁸

This Rousseauesque tribute to natural man, prefigured in the Typee chapter, is the first clear instance of what will become a dominant theme in the South Sea fiction, the full-blooded Polynesian envisioned as Adam before the Fall. Set in contrast to him will be the other natural

man of the South Pacific, the black man of Melanesia, whom London usually presented as a cross between demon and beast.

The author again takes center stage in "Chapter XIV: The Amateur Navigator," published in Pacific Monthly, May, 1910. In what is an extension of "Chapter IV: Finding One's Way About," London analyzes chronometer and compass problems that beset the Snark as it seeks out the New Hebrides. As one expects, the author-hero is able to master the situation; the successful adjustment is made. And the chapter concludes with London's first confrontation with the Melanesians, which occurs as he revels over his latest triumph. Their contrast with the beautiful Polynesians and the masterful white men is obvious:

Charmian put the wheel down, Martin stopped the engine, and the Snark rounded to and the anchor rumbled down in three fathoms. Before we could catch our breaths a swarm of black Tannese was alongside and aboard--grinning, ape-like creatures, with kinky hair and troubled eyes, wearing safety-pins and clay-pipes in their slitted ears: and as for the rest, wearing nothing behind and less than that before. And I don't mind telling that that night, when everybody was asleep, I sneaked up on deck, looked out over the quiet scene, and gloated--yes, gloated --over my navigation.⁶⁹

Thematically "Chapter XV: Cruising the Solomons," published in Pacific Monthly, June-July, 1910, is the climax of The Cruise of the Snark. In this chapter

Jack London picks up the topic of racial characteristics and combines it with the theme of the testing of the individual and the motif of anticipation and disillusionment. For all practical purposes the Snark adventure ended in the "terrible Solomons"; consequently, the author uses this chapter to bring together those elements which give thematic unity to the narrative.

"If I were king," writes London, "the worst punishment I could inflict on my enemies would be to banish them to the Solomons. (On second thought, king or no king, I don't think I'd have the heart to do it.)"⁷⁰ The Solomons' oppressive climate, its indigenous diseases, and its native population were equally horrifying to him. But it is the Melanesians themselves that draw most of his attention. Their animal-like physical ugliness and total inability to grasp, let alone live by, the white man's code of civilized conduct amazed him. Only in his wildest speculations regarding primitive man in Before Adam had London conceived of such men. Now he walked among them. One cannot fail to note the bitter, heavy-handed irony which pounds through this chapter. One paragraph suffices to dramatize it.

Another recent courageous killing I heard of on Malaita was that of an old man. A bush chief had died a natural death. Now the

bushmen don't believe in natural deaths. No one was ever known to die a natural death. The only way to die is by bullet, tomahawk, or spear thrust. When a man dies in any other way, it is a clear case of having been charmed to death. When the bush chief died naturally, his tribe placed the guilt on a certain family. Since it did not matter which one of the family was killed, they selected this old man who lived by himself. This would make it easy. Furthermore, he possessed no Snider [rifle]. Also, he was blind. The old fellow got an inkling of what was coming and laid in a large supply of arrows. Three brave warriors, each with a Snider, came down upon him in the night-time. All night they fought valiantly with him. Whenever they moved in the bush and made a noise or a rustle, he discharged an arrow in that direction. In the morning, when his last arrow was gone, the three heroes crept up to him and blew his brains out.⁷¹

For a textbook naturalist this antipathy for Melanesian ethics is illogical. However, Jack London's standards of courage and fair play are stronger than any theory of naturalistic amorality.

The central episode in this chapter--and one that horrified his socialist comrades back home--is London's participation in a "blackbirding" expedition on a Captain Jansen's yacht, the Minota. This "recruiting cruise along the savage coast of Malaita,"⁷² the most uncivilized and dangerous of the Solomon Islands, to sign up black labor for the copra plantations of Guadalcanal, was the last great "test" of the Snark cruise. The previous captain of the Minota had been hacked to death with tomahawks

when, six months before, the yacht had been "cut off" by savages on the Malaita coast. And, according to London, the incident was nearly repeated when the Minota, with the Londons aboard, ran aground and was surrounded by canoes of blacks, "like vultures circling down out of the blue."⁷³ While, with rifles at the ready, the Minota's crew worked frantically to lighten the load and refloat the ship, a message was sent requesting aid from another blackbirder a few miles away.

Three hours from the time our messenger started, a whale-boat, pressing along under a huge spread of canvas, broke through the thick shrieking squall to windward. It was Captain Keller, wet with rain and spray, a revolver in his belt, his boat's crew fully armed, anchors and hawsers heaped high amidships, coming as fast as wind could drive--the white man, the inevitable white man, coming to a white man's rescue.⁷⁴

The Minota was saved and for the last time on the cruise London could say that he had ridden the tempest and felt godlike.

Tropical diseases were now taking their toll, and the Solomons were beginning to teach London "how frail and unstable is human tissue."⁷⁵ He concludes "Cruising the Solomons" with a full-page verbatim catalogue of the various illnesses ravaging the crew of Captain Keller's Eugenie "to point out that we of the Snark are not a

crowd of weaklings."⁷⁶ Then he devotes an entire chapter, "The Amateur M. D.," which appeared in Pacific Monthly, May, 1910, to citing the maladies that turned the Snark into a hospital ship. His purpose is clear: He felt compelled to justify to his audience (and to himself) his decision to terminate the voyage. London's major fear, although he refused to say so explicitly, was that while on Molokai he had contracted some form of leprosy. The mysterious malady, which confounded his Australian specialists, he describes in these words:

On occasion my hands were twice their natural size, with seven dead and dying skins peeling off at the same time. There were times when my toe-nails, in twenty-four hours, grew as thick as they were long. After filing them off, inside another twenty-four hours they were as thick as before.⁷⁷

His remarkably resilient constitution and physical prowess, in which he had taken much pride, had obviously begun to fail him. This was the ultimate disappointment and disillusionment. Until this time, London had theoretically recognized his weakness and mortality; now the reality was upon him. Ironically, the voyage intended to demonstrate the author's triumph over "ferocious environment" had become his memento mori.

When doctors offered no cure, London determined to return to the wholesome climate of northern California.

The world cruise, begun some twenty-eight months earlier with such high hopes, ended in Australia. But in "the test of the voyage"⁷⁸ he had not found his spirit or determination wanting. Possessing a wealth of material that he would mould into short stories and novels, Jack London returned to find improved health in his beloved Valley of the Moon.

Four years later he was to write from his Sonoma ranch that all his endeavors had been an effort to achieve dominion over a recalcitrant reality. Even his country squire's life was not a retreat but an attempt "to master this soil and the crops and animals that spring from it, as I strove to master the sea, and men, and women, and the books, and all the face of life that I could stamp with my 'will to do.'"⁷⁹ Like kaleidoscopic fragments of colored glass, London's chaotic, eclectic beliefs take on a semblance of order when viewed from the perspective of his romantic egotism. The Cruise of the Snark records his most spectacular, if unsuccessful, attempt to master "the face of life" and is a valuable introduction to this paradoxical man's South Sea fiction.

NOTES

¹ London did not distinguish between realism and naturalism. And I have found no instances in which he referred to himself as a naturalist.

² Letters, p. 425.

³ Donald Pizer, Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), pp. 3-4. For a more extended discussion of realism consult George J. Becker's "Modern Realism as a Literary Movement" in Documents of Modern Literary Realism, ed. George J. Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 3-38.

⁴ Modern critics such as C. C. Walcutt in American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream, Donald Pizer in Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature, and James I. McClintock in White Logic: Jack London's Short Stories have cited this potpourri of apparently incongruous elements in the works of London and other American literary naturalists as evidence of "a dynamic tension between actuality and ideals, between the disturbing natural truths thrust upon the imagination by evolutionary thought and a sense that a humanistic conception of man is not inconsistent with a scientific perspective" (McClintock, p. 54). When London stated that "knowing no God, I have made of man my worship; and surely I have learned how vile he can be. But this only strengthens my regard, because it enhances the mighty heights he can bring himself to tread" ("To Cloudesley Johns," 30 March 1899, Letters, p. 26), he implied that his atheistic humanism had a dialectical base.

⁵ Frank Norris, "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," in The Responsibilities of the Novelist and Other Literary Essays (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1903), p. 215. This essay was published separately in December, 1901.

⁶ Norris, p. 215.

⁷ Jack London, "The Terrible and Tragic in Fiction," Critic, XLIII (June, 1903), 542.

⁸ McClintock, p. 36.

⁹ It is significant that Herman Melville was one of London's favorite authors at a time when Melville was virtually ignored by the literary community.

¹⁰ Frank Norris, quoted by C. C. Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), p. 125.

¹¹ London, The Cruise of the Snark, p. 6.

¹² Labor, Jack London, p. 60.

¹³ Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature, p. 88.

¹⁴ Jay Gurian, "The Romantic Necessity in Literary Naturalism: Jack London," American Literature, 38 (March 1966), 112.

¹⁵ Jack, p. 139.

¹⁶ C. C. Walcutt, Jack London. UMPAW, 57. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 33.

¹⁷ "To Bailey Millard," 3 April 1906, Letters, p. 197.

¹⁸ "To Hayden Carruth," 8 April 1906, Letters, p. 199.

¹⁹ "To Bailey Millard," 20 October 1906, Letters, p. 212.

²⁰ "To Editor, Cosmopolitan Magazine," 24 November 1906, Letters, p. 224-225.

²¹ The Cruise of the Snark, p. 7.

²² On page 5 of The Cruise of the Snark London asserts that "life that lives is life successful. . . . The achievement of a difficult feat is successful adjustment to a sternly exacting environment, the more difficult the feat, the greater the satisfaction at its accomplishment."

²³ The Cruise of the Snark, p. 47.

- 24 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 51.
- 25 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 53.
- 26 The Cruise of the Snark, pp. 53-54.
- 27 This theme is more fully developed in "Chapter IX: A Pacific Traverse" of The Cruise of the Snark.
- 28 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 62.
- 29 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 75.
- 30 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 76.
- 31 The Cruise of the Snark, pp. 76-77.
- 32 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 80.
- 33 Walcutt, Jack London, p. 32.
- 34 Walcutt, p. 32.
- 35 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 90.
- 36 As the Snark cruise continued, Jack London became increasingly convinced of the degenerative effect of the tropical sun on Caucasians. So when he created his idealized South Sea hero, Captain David Grief, the author entitled the short story collection in which Grief is the protagonist A Son of the Sun (1912). In the title story the narrator comments:

Unlike the other white men in the tropics, he was there because he liked it. His protective skin pigmentation was excellent. He had been born to the sun. One he was in ten thousand in the matter of sun-resistance. The invisible and high-velocity light waves failed to bore into him. Other white men were pervious. The sun drove through their skins, ripping and smashing tissues and nerves, till they became sick in mind and body, tossed most of the Decalogue overboard, descended to beastliness, drank themselves in quick graves, or survived so savagely that was vessels were sometimes sent to curb their license.

Jack London, A Son of the Sun (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1912; rpt. London: George Newnes, Ltd., n.d.), p. 21.

37 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 91.

38 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 101.

39 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 104.

40 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 105.

41 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 111.

42 London went on to treat the subject of leprosy in three highly emotional short stories, "Koolau the Leper," "Good-bye, Jack," and "The Sheriff of Kona," contained in The House of Pride (1912).

43 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 119.

44 The Cruise of the Snark, pp. 115-116.

45 An interesting comparison / contrast can be drawn between London's description of Haleakala and that of Mark Twain. See Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens), Roughing It, v. I (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishing Co., pp. 280-283).

46 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 133.

47 An interesting sidelight to this experience is that while the Snark was trapped in the Doldrums, "a handful of creatures sweltering on the ocean" (The Cruise of the Snark, p. 146), London, writing below deck, created one of the classics of the American short story, "To Build a Fire," a tale of a man freezing to death in another lonely solitude, that of the Northland's white silence.

48 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 139.

49 The Cruise of the Snark, pp. 137-138.

50 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 139.

51 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 142.

52 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 145.

- 53 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 149.
- 54 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 153.
- 55 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 29.
- 56 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 32.
- 57 The Cruise of the Snark, pp. 154-155.
- 58 The Cruise of the Snark, pp. 169-170.
- 59 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 163.
- 60 The Cruise of the Snark, pp. 170-171.
- 61 A. Grove Day, Jack London and the South Seas
(New York: Four Winds Press, 1971), p. 101.
- 62 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 177.
- 63 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 181.
- 64 London revenged himself on Levy for the real or
imagined injustice by using him, with only minor altera-
tions, as the villain in the short story "The House of
Mapuhi." For a detailed discussion of this example of
literary mayhem see Jeff Berry, "Monsieur Londre and the
Pearl Buyer," Jack London Newsletter (January-April, 1973),
pp. 13-22.
- 65 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 184.
- 66 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 197.
- 67 Walcutt, Jack London, p. 32.
- 68 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 210.
- 69 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 261.
- 70 The Cruise of the Snark, pp. 282-283.
- 71 The Cruise of the Snark, pp. 278-279. London
adapted this incident in Jerry of the Islands.
- 72 The Cruise of the Snark, pp. 263-264.

- 73 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 287.
- 74 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 291.
- 75 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 320.
- 76 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 293.
- 77 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 338.
- 78 The Cruise of the Snark, p. 339.
- 79 "To Hartwell S. Shippey," 7 February 1913, Letters,
p. 370.

CHAPTER III

THE FUNCTION OF VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH SEA NARRATIVES

"While we are members of the intelligent primate family, we are uniquely human even in the noblest sense, because for untold millions of years we alone killed for a living."

--Robert Ardrey

"We are all killers, on land and on sea; Bonapartes and Sharks included."

--Herman Melville

Violence and death preoccupied Jack London throughout his literary career. At the age of seventeen, he published his first sketch, "Typhoon Off the Coast of Japan," a tale of struggle for survival at sea, which was based on his own experiences aboard the sealer Sophia Sutherland. Twenty-three years later and less than two months before his death from an overdose of drugs, he completed the last of his short stories, "The Water Baby," a myth-enshrouded tale in which a skeptical modern man strives to find belief, some hint of an explanation beyond his materialist's creed for a world of cruelty and death--a world herein symbolized by a Polynesian youth's quest for food in a shark-infested lagoon. Although such later

stories as "The Water Baby" show a maturity, a mellowness, and a questioning of assumptions absent from his earlier work, London's essential vision of life never changed. From the beginning to the end his is the landscape of the naturalist's nightmare with few enclaves of tranquility. Fear reigns, to kill is to live, and to live is successful adjustment. Predictably, in such a fictive world violence is the most consistently recurring form of action. In fact, one recognizes that it is so integral to his creative vision that he would cease to function as an artist without it. While such an obsession with and utilization of violence are not unusual for a literary naturalist, Jack London exhibits the fullest expression of this facet of the naturalistic creed.

In discussing this aspect of London's fiction, most critics have tended to cite his Northland narratives and The Sea-Wolf to illustrate their points. But it was his South Sea experiences, particularly those in Melanesia, that "inspired London's bitterest Naturalistic writing."¹ The cruise of the South Pacific, which he had wistfully envisioned as an escape from mounting personal and financial concerns into a world typified by Melville's Typee, brought only a confirmation of his blackest fears. Polynesia, perhaps once a natural paradise, had been despoiled. "We are not in time," wrote Charmian London;

"the devastating civilizing years have preceded the Snark venture."² And London found in Melanesia the vibrant embodiment of his naturalistic jungle. When in later years he returned to his South Sea experiences for material for Jerry of the Islands (1917), he felt compelled to preface this novel with a defense of his portrayal of Melanesia. He cited instances of decapitations, cannibalism, naval bombardments of native villages, the murders of friends (including that of Captain Keller, "the inevitable white man" who had rescued the Londons when the Minota ran aground), and other horrors to dispel the misconception that his South Sea fiction was merely a "highly creditable effort of the imagination."³ Like Hemingway in the next decade, London was concerned with telling the factual truth about the world he experienced, and he felt frustrated when he was dismissed as a writer of "imaginative" fiction. "It is a misfortune," he wrote, "that fiction and unveracity in the average person's mind mean one and the same thing."⁴

Beyond the experiential level of truth, London was also dramatizing Darwin's theory of natural selection, specifically in its popularized form of "survival of the fittest," which is normally accompanied by violence. With this in mind, one can easily understand why the islands offered so congenial a setting for London's

narratives. By setting them in elemental surroundings outside the mainstream of civilization, the writer could graphically demonstrate the evolutionist's thesis which Bonapartes and sharks instinctively understand--the functional killer rules the world.

In such a world London usually posited as his protagonist the "inevitable white man" (in several instances the noble Polynesian, but rarely, if ever, the black man of Melanesia), who must strive to triumph in an indifferent or overtly hostile environment. As mentioned previously, this theme was evident in his earlier fiction, but in these South Sea stories the concept of racial mastery becomes more clearly defined and is mixed with evolutionary dogma. For better or worse, his heroes often carry the banners of their races. In the following tribute to Rudyard Kipling, the author could have been writing autobiographically and defining one of his own roles as South Sea fictionist:

Each epoch has its singer. As Scott sang the swan song of chivalry and Dickens the burger-fear of the rising merchant class, so Kipling, as no one else, has sung the hymn of the dominant bourgeoisie, the war march of the white man around the world, the triumphant paean of commercialism and imperialism. For that he will be remembered.⁵

In both style and theme Jack London considered himself a

disciple of Kipling,⁶ whom he described as he who "touches the soul of things."⁷ And as evidenced in his works themselves, this "war march of the white man" was a particularly appealing idea for a man of London's temperament and convictions. He believed that as the individual must battle to survive, so must the yellow, black, brown, and white races clash and be tested. (Almost forty years before the attack upon Pearl Harbor, London forecast a coming war between Japan and the United States for dominion in the Pacific.) Obviously, such a blend of racial imperialism with evolutionary thought contributed to the violent nature of the author's South Pacific narratives.

But violent conflict in London's fiction also springs from several other sources and is utilized with variation throughout these tales. On the individual level, he interpreted violence as one of the few means of self-expression in a naturalistic universe where heredity and environment limit the freedom of man. As the analysis of The Cruise of the Snark indicated, London conceived of his voyage as another test of self against all that was opposed to his will, and this testing often took the form of dangerous and violent action. In these South Sea stories, he vicariously lived and relived such adventures

through his protagonists, who also found in violence their means of expression. Alfred Kazin expressed essentially this idea when, speaking of London and his work, he said:

He never believed in any strength equal to his, for that strength had come from his own self-assertion; out of both came his delight in violence. He proved himself by it, as seaman and adventurer, and it was by violence that his greatest characters came to live. Violence was their only avenue of expression in a world which, as London conceived it, was a testing-ground for the strong; violence expressed the truth of life, both the violence of the naturalist creed and the violence of superior men and women.⁸

Kazin exaggerates London's self-confidence. The ironic motif of anticipation and disillusioning failure traced through The Cruise of the Snark, as well as the recurring theme of failure despite heroic struggle which runs through his fiction, reflects the naturalist's recognition of the limitations placed on human aspiration by the "law of life." Nevertheless, Kazin is basically correct in interpreting the violence in London's fiction as integral to the test motif and, consequently, as a form of self-expression for his protagonists.

Tangentially related to the concept of violence as self-expression is the paradox that many of the author's primitive characters fully experience life only while

performing that act for which they are naturally suited: killing. This aspect of London's use of violence is most overtly dramatized in The Call of the Wild, White Fang, and The Sea-Wolf, but it also surfaces in several of the key South Sea narratives and is worthy of consideration.

Within the confines of doctrinaire naturalism, violence logically functions in the above-mentioned fashions. But ultimately there is a pattern of inexplicable horrors in many of these works which appears to go beyond a dutiful allegiance to the naturalist's vision. At times Jack London appears to verge on nihilism and a belief in man as "the deluded victim of a cosmic joke."⁹ He seems to revel in the details of violence, suffering, and death. As George Orwell stated, "there is something in London that takes a kind of pleasure in the whole cruel process"¹⁰ But before one indulges in Sunday supplement psychology and labels London a latent sadist, he should recognize that an alternative explanation may lie in the fact that as a master of such description and as a professional writer always mindful of the public's taste for the spectacular, he reasonably opted for such passages when he felt that they were artistically justifiable. "He had a Gorkylike power to make his reader feel things of physical horror--starvation, Indian torture, cannibalism,

leprosy, and small pox--all the coarseness and primitive hells latent in man and let loose in the areas of savage savagery."¹¹ Nonetheless, the massive accumulation of terrors found in his South Sea fiction (absent only from On the Makaloa Mat, his last story collection to be discussed in the next chapter) strongly suggests that somewhere in the dark recesses of his psyche, Jack London felt the appeal of savagery, the call of the wild, as alluringly as the most atavistic of his fictional creations.

Although violence derived from interpersonal conflict dominates London's narratives, the most successful descriptive passages in the South Sea fiction recreate one of nature's most awesomely violent challenges to man--the hurricane. There is no record of London's experiencing such a tropical storm during the Snark voyage, but, as mentioned previously, his acquaintance with the great typhoons was long standing, having been formed when as a youth he sailed the North Pacific sealing grounds.¹² Consequently, when in such short stories as "The House of Mapuhi" and "The Pearls of Parley"¹³ the author utilizes the hurricane as a central dramatic incident to demonstrate the power of environmental forces over puny man, his writing has the ring of authenticity.

"The House of Mapuhi," the story of a Polynesian native of the Paumotus (Tuamotu Archipelago) and his

difficulties in obtaining his lifelong wish, a house with a "roof of galvanized iron and an octagon-drop-clock,"¹⁴ is not one of London's artistic successes, primarily because his blending of black humor, violent action, coincidence, and criticism of the exploitation of the Polynesians by whites is awkward and lacking focus. However, when London begins to describe the coming on of a hurricane--"the air was sticky like mucilage, and the weight of it seemed to burden the lungs and make breathing difficult"¹⁵--he is the master in his element. His knowledge of the effects of wind and heavy seas on sailing ships contributes to the narrative's verisimilitude:

The squall had cleared away, but the sky remained overcast. The two schooners, under all sail and joined by a third, could be seen making back. A veer in the wind induced them to slack off sheets, and five minutes afterward a sudden veer from the opposite quarter caught all three schooners aback, and those on shore could see the boom-tackles being slacked away or cast off on the jump. The sound of the surf was loud, hollow, and menacing, and a heavy swell was setting in.¹⁶

Similarly his choice of detail is effective. As the hurricane winds rose, "a Paumotan, with a litter of new-born puppies in a basket, climbed into a cocoanut [sic] tree and twenty feet above the ground made the basket

fast. The mother floundered about in the water beneath, whining and yelping."¹⁷

Another indication that London is in command of his material, and knows it, is that in this section of the short story he successfully ventures into symbolic description, never his forte. His opinion of the South Sea missionaries (Father Damien excepted) was almost as negative as Mark Twain's and the hurricane affords him the opportunity to give them a sly jab: "He looked and saw the Mormon church careering drunkenly a hundred feet away. It had been torn from its foundations, and wind and sea were heaving and shoving it toward the lagoon."¹⁸ Being a two-fisted drinker since his teen-age years, London could not resist poking fun at the sobriety of the Mormons, and he generalized and deepened his criticism through the passage's echoes of Matthew 7, 24-27: "And everyone who hears these my words and does not act upon them, shall be likened to a foolish man who built his house on sand [literally true of the church on the atoll]. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and was utterly ruined."

London also employs a standard naturalistic technique to emphasize the futility of the individual's struggle against elemental forces--dehumanization. When filtered

through the consciousness of Alexandre Raoul, a pearl buyer, the Polynesians clinging to the treetops become

bunches of human fruit [which] fell like ripe cocoanuts. The subsiding wave showed them on the ground, some lying motionless, others squirming and writhing. They reminded him strangely of ants. He was not shocked. He had risen above horror. Quite as a matter of course he noted the succeeding wave sweep the sand clean of the human wreckage.¹⁹

As the above quotation indicates, the psychological as well as the physical effect of the hurricane upon its victims is strikingly conveyed.

He felt very lonely in the darkness. At times it seemed to him that it was the end of the world and that he was the last one left alive. Still the wind increased. Hour after hour it increased. By what he calculated was eleven o'clock, the wind had become unbelievable. It was a horrible, monstrous thing, a screaming fury, a wall that smote and passed on but that continued to smite and pass on--a wall without end. It seemed to him that he had become light and ethereal; that it was he that was in motion; that he was being driven with inconceivable velocity through unending solidness. The wind was no longer air in motion. It had become substantial as water or quick silver. He had a feeling he could reach into it and tear it out in chunks as one might do with the meat in the carcass of a steer; that he could seize hold of the wind and hang on to it as a man might hang on the face of a cliff. . . .

Body and brain became wearied. He no longer observed, no longer thought, and was but semi-conscious. One idea constituted his consciousness: So this was a hurricane.²⁰

In contrast to "The House of Mapuhi," Jack London's "The Pearls of Parlay," a tale of revenge with supernatural overtones, is one of the first-rate stories in his South Sea canon. Parlay is an aged Frenchman who rules the Hikihoho Atoll in French Polynesia. Decades before he had married a native queen and fathered a beautiful daughter, Armande, who, as a child, was sent to a convent school in France. When as a stunning eighteen-year-old she returns to the South Pacific, the white colonials of Papeete, Tahiti, snub her because of her mixed blood; her suicide is the consequence. Parlay then blames all white men for his daughter's death and goes into seclusion on his island. Years later he invites the powerful pearl buyers of Polynesia to Hikihoho to bid for his renowned hoard of pearls. The natives credit him with supernatural powers and many--white and brown alike--believe that he has called this gathering for the real purpose of destroying those he blames for Armande's tragedy. The night before the auction is to begin, a ferocious hurricane strikes the atoll, and Parlay's dying words are "My brave gentlemen . . . don't forget . . . the auction . . . at ten o'clock . . . in hell."²¹ Naturally David Grief, the effulgent Apollo of The Son of the Sun series from which this story is taken, survives, but Parlay's revenge is nearly complete.

While Howard Lachtman has particularly praised what he interprets as London's artful adaptation of elements of The Tempest in this tale,²² among the most memorable aspects of the narrative, as in The Cruise of the Snark, are London's descriptions of violent natural phenomena. Note, for example, this presentation of the coming on of the hurricane winds which combines a naturalist's objectivity with spectacular subject matter.

"There she comes," he said quietly.

They did not need glasses to see. A flying film, strangely marked, seemed drawing over the surface of the lagoon. Abreast of it, along the atoll, travelling with equal speed, was a stiff bending of the cocoanut palms and a blur of flying leaves. The front of the wind on the water was a solid, sharply defined strip of dark-coloured, wind-vexed water. In advance of this strip, like skirmishers, were flashes of wind-flaws. Behind this strip, a quarter of a mile in width, was a strip of what seemed glassy calm. Next came another dark strip of wind, and behind that the lagoon was all crisping, boiling whiteness. . . .

The Roberta, lying nearest to the wind at slack chains, was swept off broadside like a straw. Then her chains brought her up, bow on to the wind, with an astonishing jerk. Schooner after schooner, the Malahini with them, was now sweeping away with the first gust and fetching up on taut chains. . . .

And then there was no wind. The flying calm streak had reached them. Grief lighted a match, and the unshielded flame burned without flickering in the still air. A very dim twilight prevailed. The cloud-sky, lowering as it had been for hours, seemed now to have descended quite down upon the sea.²³

As Eugene Burdick has commented, in "The Pearls of Parlay" London's "description is masterful, an exercise in economy and the glancing insight. . . . In the end London does the impossible: he makes the wind visible, gives it palpable character."²⁴

Jack London's utilization of hurricanes is representative of his use of the violence of nature to dramatize the naturalistic struggle for survival in a universe hostile to human aspiration. Yet "The House of Mapuhi" and "The Pearls of Parlay" are simultaneously in the romantic adventure story tradition. Consequently Mapuhi and David Grief, his protagonists, triumph over, rather than succumb to, their hostile environments. The reader senses that the demands of the popular reading public and London's own emotional belief that the individual is capable of tactical, if limited, victories have overruled his pessimistic, quasi-scientific evaluation of man's fate. Such tales reflect the clash of pragmatic necessity, personal conviction, and intellectual commitment that is typical of London's art and that has been seen in The Cruise of the Snark.

However prevalent the man-versus-nature conflict may be in the South Sea narratives, the basic source of violence within them is racial conflict--that which determines the fittest race. "War is to-day the final arbiter in the

affairs of men," wrote London, "and it is as yet the final test of the worthwhileness of peoples."²⁶ And for London the white man, especially the Anglo-Saxon, was the most "worthwhile." In his letters and essays this theme is repeated over and over:

I do not believe in the universal brotherhood of man. . . . I believe my race is the salt of the earth. I am a scientific socialist, not a utopian. . . . ²⁷

An evolutionist believing in Natural Selection . . . I cannot but hail as unavoidable the Black and the Brown going down before the White.²⁸

[W]e must come to understand that nature has no sentiment, no charity, no mercy; we are blind puppets at the play of great unreasoning forces; yet we may come to know the laws of some of the forces. . . . These forces generated the altruistic in man; the race with the highest altruism will endure--the highest altruism considered from the standpoint of merciless natural law, which never concedes nor alters. The lesser breeds cannot endure. The Indian is an example, as is the black man of the Australian Bush, the South Sea Islander, the inhabitant of the Sub-Arctics, etc.²⁹

Back of our own great race adventure, back of our robberies by sea and land, our lusts and violences and all the evil things we have done, there is a certain integrity, a sternness of conscience, a melancholy responsibility of life, a sympathy and comradeship and warm human feel, which is ours . . . , and which we cannot teach to the Oriental as we would teach logarithms or the trajectory of projectiles. That we have groped for the way of right conduct and agonized over the soul betokens our spiritual endowment. Though we have strayed often from righteousness, the voices of the seers have always been raised, and we have harked back to the bidding of

conscience. The colossal fact of our history is that we have made the religion of Jesus Christ our religion. No matter how dark in error and deed, ours has been a history of spiritual struggle and endeavor. We are preeminently a religious race, which is another way of saying that we are a right-seeking race.³⁰

The most curious aspect of these statements when viewed in conjunction is that Jack London was simultaneously employing Darwin's evolutionary theory and Christian morality to justify white imperialism and its bloody consequences. If such beliefs were expressed today, whoever held them, rightly or wrongly, would be denounced by the intellectual community. But few eyebrows were raised when London espoused these convictions at the turn of the century; for as Thomas F. Gossett has pointed out in Race: The History of an Idea in America, the concept of racial superiority was so completely an accepted part of sociological opinion that it served, as in London's case, "as an underlying philosophy in fiction."³¹ Note, for example, the similarity between London's statements and the following passage taken from the introduction to Theodore Roosevelt's The Winning of the West (1889), a history that drew praise from such luminaries as Francis Parkman and Alfred Thayer Mahan:

The most ultimately righteous of all wars is a war with savages, though it is apt to be also

the most terrible and inhuman. The rude, fierce settler who drove the savage from the land lays all civilized mankind under a debt to him. American and Indian, Boer and Zulu, Cossack and Tartar, New Zealander and Maori-- in each case the victor, horrible though many of his deeds are, has laid deep the foundations for the future greatness of a mighty people . . . it is of incalculable importance that America, Australia, and Siberia should pass out of the hands of their red, black, and yellow aboriginal owners, and become the heritage of the dominant world races.³²

Although such ideas were "in the air," and accepted part of the intellectual milieu of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, the primary source of Jack London's philosophy of race was Benjamin Kidd (1858-1916), British sociologist and author.³³ Of particular interest to London were Kidd's The Control of the Tropics (1893) and Social Evolution (1894), in which he expounded the theory that "evolution which is slowly proceeding in human society is not primarily intellectual but religious in character."³⁴ While London quickly jettisoned the supernatural dimensions of this proposition, he took to himself Kidd's affirmation of the ethical superiority of the white race. The Caucasian was not biologically superior, but his moral strength was so great that despite his altruism (a catchword for both Kidd and London), the lesser breeds "have tended to disappear before the more vigorous incoming race."³⁵ The value of

such a thesis for London was that it enabled him to absolve the white man of moral responsibility for the brutal consequences of the clash of races.³⁶ In a brilliant coup, Kidd and London, his disciple, were able to baptize both evolutionary thought and white imperialism. Racial competition was natural and good, but, at least for the time being, the white race must dominate because it "has evolved a superior religious belief and social efficiency and is, therefore, actually superior to the yellow and black races. The other races have the same potential if shown the way, but until they are made to see the value of competition, they will stand no chance of making progress."³⁷ As Roy W. Carlson has noted, Kidd's theory was immensely popular, for it offered something to everyone, satisfying "religionists, competition-minded businessmen, racists, evolutionists and imperialists, and only slighted the socialists."³⁸

Of particular interest in any study of London's South Sea fiction is Kidd's application of his theory to the development of the tropics. This area, he argued, was the potential breadbasket of the world. However, "in dealing with the natural inhabitants of the tropics we are dealing with peoples who represent the same stage in the history of the development of the race that the child does in the history of the development of the individual."³⁹

Therefore, since the native population is unable to develop this region's resources, it is the duty of the white man to farm the tropics, to control and direct their exploitation. If the native inhabitants suffer as a result, this is unavoidable and, when seen in the total context of evolutionary necessity and ultimate beneficence of result, rather insignificant.⁴⁰ In his essays and letters it is clear that Jack London accepted this thesis. Being convinced of the moral superiority of the white man, he was able to justify (in his nonfiction works) the white's subjugation of the blacks, browns and yellows and its resultant horrors. "Much could be forgiven the race . . . when that race stood . . . at the peak of righteousness."⁴¹ "No great race adventure," stated London as he echoed Kidd, "can go far nor endure long which has no deeper foundation than material success, no higher prompting than conquest for conquest's sake and mere race glorification. To go far and to endure, it must have behind it an ethical impulse, a sincerely conceived righteousness."⁴²

As one reads page after page of such defenses of white imperialism in London's essays, he is reminded of Marlow's comment in Heart of Darkness: "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses

than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea-- something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer sacrifice to. . . . "⁴³ Fortunately, Jack London did "look into" the reality of imperialism during the cruise of the Snark, and the tension created by the discrepancy between idea and actuality produced some of his better tales of the South Pacific. The remainder of this chapter is devoted, therefore, to an analysis of seven short stories and one novel that reflect Jack London's shifting, paradoxical and sometimes merely contradictory opinions regarding race and the racial violence stemming from white imperialism.

"Mauki,"⁴⁴ the first of these works to be considered, is based, as are most of London's South Sea narratives, upon factual incidents and actual characters. In Through the South Seas with Jack London Martin Johnson records that while on Ontong Java (Lord Howe) Atoll he and the Londons met a renegade Melanesian and a Dutch trader whose brutality was evinced by his unprovoked beatings of subservient Polynesians. "On going back to the trader's house, we noticed a Solomon Islander working around the

place. When we asked why this native should be so far from home, we learned that he had been recruited about five years before to work on a plantation for the trading company, and had been put at this lagoon to prevent his getting away."⁴⁵ Likewise, Charmian London took notice of this black, and in her diary entry for September 18, 1908, she comments on seeing a "mild-faced Solomon Island cook, who, despite his deceptive weak prettiness, is deservedly serving an aggregation of sentences [on Lord Howe Atoll] that cover eight years, for murders, escapes in handcuffs, thefts of whaleboats--a history of blood curdling crimes and reprisals too long to go into here, but which so tickles Jack's fancy that he intends making a short story of it, to be called 'Mauki'. . . ."⁴⁶

Within two weeks London had begun "Mauki," which stands apart from his other Melanesian fiction in that it posits a black as protagonist. What makes the author's handling of this material even more remarkable is that the biography of the real Mauki--a history of refusal to bow to the will of the white man--would appear to nominate him for the status of villain. But as the analysis of this and subsequent stories will indicate, London's penchant for siding with the underdog (the Polynesian more

so than the Melanesian) and his recognition of the evils inherent in imperialism often counteract his racial bias.

London's plot is simple. The son of a salt-water chieftain of Malaita, the youthful Mauki is captured and enslaved by Fanfoa, the chief of an inland tribe, and subsequently "leased" to the Moongleam Soap Company in exchange "for half a case of tobacco advance, along with knives, axes, calico, and beads, which he would pay for with his toil on the plantations."⁴⁷ As in most of London's South Sea stories, authorial comment is restricted. But passages such as the following convey the writer's sympathy for the black man's plight:

Down into the cabin they took Mauki. On deck, the one white man kept guard with two revolvers in his belt. In the cabin the other white man sat with a book before him, in which he inscribed strange marks and lines. He looked at Mauki as though he had been a pig or fowl, glanced under the hollows of his arms, and wrote in the book. Then he held out the writing stick and Mauki just barely touched it with his hand, in so doing pledging himself to toil for three years on the plantations of the Moongleam Soap Company. It was not explained to him that the will of the ferocious white men would be used to enforce the pledge, and that, behind all, for the same use, was all the power and all the warships of Great Britain.⁴⁸

On the island of New Georgia Mauki slaves and learns the basics of the white man's law--work hard and cause

no trouble. While the masters are "just" and keep their word (even when drunk) by never striking "unless a rule had been broken,"⁴⁹ Mauki's free spirit rebels. Within two years he initiates the first of nine unsuccessful attempts to escape. Although London describes Mauki as possessing uncharacteristic good looks for a Melanesian and the character traits he admired, "pluck, pertinacity, fearlessness, imagination, and cunning,"⁵⁰ the author makes clear that Fenimore Cooper's noble savage isn't found in the Melanesian hell. In one escape attempt in a whaleboat with nine other Malaitans, Mauki joins in the killing of a "San Cristoval boy, saving his head and cooking and eating the rest of him."⁵¹

Finally, the company ships Mauki north to Lord Howe Atoll to serve out his extended indenture. Lord Howe, not part of the Solomon Islands, is inhabited by Polynesians and ruled by the company's sole representative, Max Bunster, "a strapping big German with something wrong in his brain."⁵² In point of fact, Bunster is a sadist, the degenerate embodiment of the higher order. His superiors had sent him to this "outpost of progress" in hopes of getting rid of him, but he survives because the once proud and warlike Polynesian population of the atoll has learned that the white man, any white man, is inviolate.

The Sailing Directions speak of them as hostile and treacherous. But the men who compile the Sailing Directions have never heard of the change that was worked in the hearts of the inhabitants, who, not many years ago, cut off a big bark and killed all hands with the exception of the second mate. This survivor carried the news to his brothers. The captains of three trading schooners returned with him to Lord Howe. They sailed their vessels right into the lagoon and proceeded to preach the white man's gospel that only white men shall kill white men and that the lesser breeds must keep hands off. The schooners sailed up and down the lagoon, harrying and destroying. There was no escape from the narrow sand-circle, no bush to which to flee. The men were shot down on sight, and there was no avoiding being sighted. The villages were burned, the canoes smashed, the chickens and pigs killed, and the precious cocoanut-trees chopped down. For a month this continued, when the schooners sailed away; but the fear of the white man had been seared into the souls of the islanders and never again were they rash enough to harm one.⁵³

When critics write of Jack London's excessive, perhaps abnormal, interest in violence and physical suffering, this story, especially the section cataloguing Bunster's tortures of Mauki and other representatives of the "lesser breeds," is often cited. His favorite plaything is a mitten made of ray fish skin, which is so rasplike that the natives use it to sand the hulls of canoes.

The first time he tried it on Mauki, with one sweep of the hand it fetched the skin off his back from neck to armpit. Bunster was delighted. He gave his [Polynesian] wife a taste of the mitten, and tried it out thoroughly on the

boat-boys. The [Polynesian] prime ministers came in for a stroke each, and they had to grin and take it as a joke.

"Laugh, damn you, laugh!" was the cue he gave.⁵⁴

Somehow, Mauki manages to endure until Bunster is bedridden with blackwater fever; then, with the infamous mitten, he takes his revenge and escapes to Malaita, leaving Bunster's torso, "a hideous, skinless thing,"⁵⁵ on the sands of Lord Howe. In the Malaitan bush he kills Fanfoa, the chieftain who had enslaved him, and becomes ruler of the tribe. Yet his fear of the Moongleam Soap Company induces him to pay seven hundred and fifty dollars in gold for his unfulfilled "services" and the property he stole, while, for once, the white men ignore the murder of one of their kind.

The story ends with Mauki in possession of power, respect, wives, and bushmen's heads--all that a Melanesian could desire--but, above all else, he relishes "another head, perfectly dried and cured, with sandy hair and a yellowish beard, which is kept wrapped in the finest of fibre lava-lavas. When Mauki goes to war with villages beyond his realm, he invariably gets out this head, and, alone in his grass palace, contemplates it long and solemnly. At such times the hush of death falls on the village, and not even a pickaninny dares make a noise.

The head is esteemed the most powerful devil-devil on Malaita, and to the possession of it is ascribed all of Mauki's greatness."⁵⁶

Significantly, in "Mauki" Jack London's suppression, if not elimination, of his antipathy for the Melanesian culture and moral code allows him to recognize in Mauki the traditional virtues which he searches for in himself during the Snark cruise and which he posits in his fictive heroes: courageous endurance and a refusal to submit to the powerful forces arrayed against them. Yet Mauki's heroic stature is relative. In point of fact, the brutality of white imperialism, ironically represented by the Moongleam Soap Company and its demented Max Bunster, is required to function as antagonist, thereby lessening the effect upon the reader of Mauki's own brutalities. In a different context, Mauki as villain is easily imagined.

When one reads this story after reading London's essays on race, the contrast is clear; and he realizes that Benjamin Kidd's justification of white imperialism has taken a fearful beating. The author has looked beyond the idea and found in the reality the heart of darkness. Seen in this context, his dwelling upon the sadistic violence and terrors of Mauki's experience is not only justifiable but necessary. "'Mauki' is Jack

London's brief for the Melanesian victimized by the advent of the white man's industrialized civilization."⁵⁷

The only limitation of London's criticism of the white man in "Mauki" is the personal nature of the conflict between the black man and Max Bunster, who is less than typical of western society. Therefore, as if intentionally to reinforce and generalize his criticism, Jack London followed "Mauki" with a second short story set on Lord Howe Atoll. This tale with the unfortunate title "Yah! Yah! Yah!"⁵⁸ develops the incident briefly mentioned in the previous story--the genocidal raid upon the island by revenge-seeking white men. In her discussion of the genesis of this story,⁵⁹ Charmian London, not the most perceptive critic of her husband's work, treats this subject as merely colorful material for an adventure yarn, but as an analysis of the story indicates, the plight of the native Polynesians affected London, perhaps more deeply than he fully realized.

"Yah! Yah! Yah!" is told from the point of view of an unnamed white narrator recently arrived on Oolong Atoll, the writer's alias for Lord Howe. As the narrator surveys the island and its inhabitants, his curiosity is aroused by the incongruous subservience of the native population, "five thousand Polynesians, all strapping

men and women, many of them standing six feet in height and weighing a couple of hundred pounds,"⁶⁰ to an aged, whiskey-guzzling Scotsman, McAllister, the island's only permanent white resident.

It was a miracle that he had not died suddenly long since. Unlike the cowardly Melanesians, the people were high-stomached and warlike. In the big graveyard, at head and feet of the graves, were relics of past sanguinary history--blubber-spades, rusty old bayonets and cutlasses, copper bolts, rudder-irons, harpoons, bomb guns, bricks that could have come from nowhere but a whaler's trying-out furnace, and old brass pieces of the sixteenth century that verified the traditions of the early Spanish navigators. Ship after ship had come to grief on Oolong. Not thirty years before, the whaler Blennerdale . . . had been cut off with all hands. In similar fashion had the crew of the Gasket, a sandalwood trader, perished. There was a big French bark, the Toulon, becalmed off the atoll, which the islanders boarded after a sharp tussle and wrecked. . . . All this, of the vessels named, is a matter of history, and is to be found in the South Pacific Sailing Directory.⁶¹

But there is a second and unwritten history which reader and narrator are to discover jointly when Oti, a noble Polynesian, relates the story of the subjugation of the Polynesians. Years before, Oti had participated in an attack on a schooner, which had come into the lagoon to fish for bêche-de-mer. One white man, the mate, escaped to sea in a small boat, only to return some months later as a member of a three-schooner raiding party come to

teach the savages the power of the white man. "Yah! Yah! Yah!" was the taunt of the mate as gunfire, dynamite, starvation, and measles (intentionally introduced by the whites) effectively made the point. "We were twenty-five thousand on Oolong before the three schooners came," says Oti. "To-day we are five thousand. After the schooners left, we were but three thousand. . . ." ⁶²

Because the narrator fails to comment on the incidents related and because of Oti's grim "praise" of the whites ("I understand at last why the white men have taken to themselves all the islands in the sea. It is because they are hell." ⁶³) some readers interpret this story as a tribute to the all-conquering white man. While London's essays make clear that he took overweening pride in his race, the "kingly species," the moral contrast between the respected Oti and the drunken McAllister and the failure of the other whites to reflect any semblance of the higher morality that Kidd and London purported to find in the Caucasian's character argue convincingly for the author's implicit criticism of the white man and his "race adventure."

As noted, in his nonfiction works the Spencerian naturalist in London tended to view racial violence and its concomitant horrors as goods intrinsic to the natural

process; however, on occasion he did evaluate such conflict and consequences in a truly human (i.e., moral) context, as when he wrote of the conquest of the Hawaiian Islands: "The white man is the born looter and just as the North American Indian was looted of his continent by the white man, so was the Hawaiian looted by the white man of his islands. Such things be. They are morally indefensible."⁶⁴ Granted, such statements are rare in the author's essays, but the ethical judgment expressed above informs and adds complexity to many of his supposedly simple adventure stories.

In the introduction to this chapter, violence was cited as a means of self-expression in a naturalistic universe where powerful forces limit or deny human freedom. In "Mauki" and "Yah! Yah! Yah!" this function of violence is given graphic demonstration. Max Bunster, the mentally defective brute, is described as "offended with life."⁶⁵ A failure in the competitive civilized world, he takes out his frustrations and rage on Mauki and the Polynesians of Lord Howe. In his perverted way he is trying to ride the tempest and feel godlike, but violence is his only avenue of expression. Inflicting pain and taking life are his means of living fully, defining and asserting himself. Operating on the same level is the mate in

"Yah! Yah! Yah!" His taunt, demonstrative of his basic inarticulateness, is his only communication in the story, and the only action which the reader sees him perform is killing. Both characters are excellent examples of atavistic man functioning in a ferocious environment.

While some of his contemporaries doubted the verisimilitude of Jack London's South Sea fiction, those in his audience with knowledge of the nineteenth-century colonial experience from the Khyber Pass to the Philippine jungles did not and saw reflected in it ugly truths regarding the effects upon civilized man of battles with frontier barbarians. "Yah! Yah! Yah!" could well have served as an exemplum for Theodore Roosevelt's summation of these confrontations and their consequences:

It is a primeval warfare, and it is waged as war was waged in the ages of bronze and iron. All the merciful humanity that even war has gained during the last two thousand years is lost. It is a warfare where no pity is shown to non-combatants, where the weak are harried without ruth, and the vanquished are maltreated with ferocity. A sad and evil feature of such warfare is that the whites, the representatives of civilization, speedily sink almost to the level of their barbarous foes, in point of hideous brutality.⁶⁶

Benjamin Kidd was particularly cognizant of this diminution of moral strength among whites in the tropics, even when they were not directly engaged in fighting for survival:

"In climatic conditions which are a burden to him; in the midst of races in a different and lower stage of development; divorced from the influences which have produced him, from the moral and political environment from which he sprang, the white man does not in the end, in such circumstances, tend so much to raise the level of the races amongst whom he has made his unnatural home, as he tends himself to sink slowly to the level around him."⁶⁷ As if to dramatize this very idea, one of London's villains characterizes himself in these words:

"Oh, I don't mind being caught in a dirty trick," Griffiths was saying defiantly. "I've been in the tropics too long. I'm a sick man. And the whiskey, and the sun, and the fever have made me sick in morals, too. Nothing's too mean and low for me now, and I can understand why the niggers eat each other, and take heads, and such things. I could do it myself. So I call trying to do you out of that small account a pretty mild trick.⁶⁸ Wisht I could offer you a drink."

While whites of heroic stature are found in the South Sea fiction, they are outnumbered by the McAllisters, Bunsters, and Griffiths whose presence indicates the pervasive influence of Kidd's theory upon the author's narratives.

The last overtly violent short story from the South Sea Tales collection to be considered here is "The Inevitable White Man."⁶⁹ London's use of irony to qualify his praise of the white man's domination of the blacks and the effectiveness of his clear, direct presentation of violent action make this one of the most interesting of his Melanesian stories.

In "The Inevitable White Man," as in "Yah! Yah! Yah!," Jack London utilized one of his favorite structural devices, the frame story, in which an unnamed "outside" narrator sets the scene and then listens to a tale related by an "inside" narrator, a participant in the events described. The setting is a saloon in Apia, the capital of Western Samoa, where Captain Woodward, an experienced South Sea skipper whose scalp and neck bear the scars of Melanesian tomahawk and arrow, Charley Roberts, the owner of the pub, and an unnamed narrator are discussing race relations in the South Pacific. Woodward is convinced that "the black will never understand the white, nor the white the black. . . ."⁷⁰ When Roberts asserts that "half the trouble is the stupidity of the whites . . ." and " [i]f the white man would lay himself out a bit to understand the workings of the black man's mind, most of the messes would be avoided,"⁷¹ Woodward cites the grisly

deaths of numerous whites "who claimed they understood niggers."⁷² Agreement is reached that "the white man's mission is to farm the world" and that "it's his stupidity that makes him succeed, and surely one phase of his stupidity is his inability to understand niggers. But there's one thing for sure, the white man has to run the niggers whether he understands them or not. It's inevitable. It's fate."⁷³ The remainder of the story is Captain Woodward's reminiscence of an incident intended to illustrate this evaluation of the white man and his fated role in history.

Twenty years before, John Saxtorph, a nondescript little man "constitutionally unable to learn anything,"⁷⁴ served with then mate Woodward aboard the Duchess, a blackbirding schooner. All that was known of Saxtorph was that he was a Yankee with one ability, his expert marksmanship with handgun and rifle. As a sailor he was a total failure, but when the Duchess was "cut off" by savages on the Malaita coast, Saxtorph justified his existence. In a passage of coolly disinterested description suggestive of Hemingway's presentation of the gunfight on the streets of Havana which opens To Have and Have Not, London, through Woodward, painted the scene.

Woodward, who was hatcheted during the first moments of the attack, sat "half-stunned" and "fascinated by that glowing vision of death."⁷⁵ With the rest of the crew slain, Saxtorph had managed to climb into the rigging with two Winchesters and bandoliers of ammunition, and, in a virtuoso performance, "he was now doing the one and only thing in this world he was fitted to do."⁷⁶

"I've seen shooting and slaughter, but I never saw anything like that. . . . I was weak and faint, and it seemed to be all a dream. Bang, bang, bang, bang, went his rifle, and thud, thud, thud, thud, went the niggers to the deck. . . . When his rifle got too hot, Saxtorph changed off. That had been his idea when he carried two rifles up with him.

"The astonishing thing was the rapidity of his fire. Also, he never made a miss. If ever anything was inevitable, that man was. It was the swiftness of it that made the slaughter so appalling. The niggers did not have time to think. When they did manage to think, they went over the side in a rush, capsizing the canoes of course. Saxtorph never let up. The water was covered with them, and plump, plump, plump, he dropped his bullets into them. Not a single miss, and I could hear distinctly the thud of every bullet as it buried in human flesh. . . .

"Some of the long shots were magnificent. Only one man reached the beach, but as he stood up to wade ashore, Saxtorph got him. It was beautiful. . . .

"It reminded me of trapshooting. A black body would pop out of the companion, bang would go Saxtorph's rifle, and down would go the black body."⁷⁷

When the carnage was over, Saxtorph was again helpless, unable to function effectively. If the severely wounded

Woodward had been unable to make decisions and order Saxtorph about, "the inevitable white man" would have perished. But together they bring the limping Duchess into Sydney harbor.

As the Captain's story ends, Charley Roberts mutters: "Farming the world. Well here's to them. Somebody's got to do it--farm the world, I mean."⁷⁸ Undoubtedly, at least upon one level, Jack London subscribed to this evaluation of the happenings described. As an adventurer fascinated by the test of self inherent in violent conflict, as a believer in the white man's right to dominion, and as an adherent of Kidd's theory of the ultimate altruistic ends of white imperialism, he sympathized with the Captain Woodwards of the South Pacific, and his disdain for the Melanesians was real. However, to view this story merely as a brutal "paean to the white hero"⁷⁹ is unjustified; for surely London's praise has been qualified almost to the point of extinction. His positing of the abysmally stupid Saxtorph--whose one "virtue" is a mastery of mindless slaughter--as the perfect farmer of the tropics is slim tribute to "Mr. White Man." Such men (not unlike Stephen Crane's Henry Fleming in the midst of battle) fulfill their destiny when functioning on the level of predatory beasts in the chaos of conflict. To find self-expression through

violence, and, paradoxically, to live fully only while taking life is to be less than totally human--a truth that London and Captain Woodward (who clearly dissociates himself from Saxtorph) both realize.

In "The Inevitable White Man" characters speak of "fate" or "inevitableness"--the immutable law of nature--as determining racial, as well as individual, characteristics, but one facet of the ethical man behind the pen is critical of such an easy dismissal of moral concerns. As noted, there are three men at the table in Charley Roberts' pub. One, the unnamed narrator of the frame story comments only once, but his remark reverberates with understated irony: "But I wonder what the black man must think of the--the inevitableness. . . ." ⁸⁰ Again, the tension created by the author's inability to reconcile his generalized racial theories with his moral revulsion at their consequences has added depth and complexity to his work.

With one conspicuous exception, "The Seed of McCoy," to be discussed subsequently, the short stories contained in the South Sea Tales collection are the most consistently violent of Jack London's South Pacific narratives, and they are severely criticized for this, as well as for a combination of other artistic and philosophical characteristics, by James I. McClintock, a respected London authority.

Chiefly he objects to the comic or "inappropriately light" tone with which the "grotesque subject matter" is presented and the "perverse sensationalism of the stag-magazine variety" that "had replaced London's earlier interest in ordeal and primitivism as elements in a ritual of self-definition. An atavistic conflict between a 'primitive savage' and 'a degenerate brute' ["Mauki"] takes men to the nadir of human experience but does not restore them to new values. The tropical zeitgeist is demented."⁸¹ McClintock is a perceptive reader, and his study of London's short fiction is a standard in the field. However, of the stories discussed in this chapter, only the artistically weak "House of Mapuhi" and "The Inevitable White Man" possess such a lightness of tone. While McClintock is particularly critical of the latter, I find its mood and tone both appropriate and effective. It should be remembered that, considering setting and character, Captain Woodward would reasonably present his reminiscence in the barroom conversational style. Evidently he is not a deep thinker but rather a simple man of action, an exploiter of the Pacific paradise, who views the Melanesian as his natural enemy. Woodward is not Jack London, but if the author does have a surrogate, he is the unnamed narrator with

whom we sit listening to the Captain's story. His understated comment is London's obliquely ironic reminder of his own recognition of the evils manifest in Saxtorph's exploit.

In describing these stories as dramatizing "the nadir of human experience," McClintock is supporting Earle Labor's assertion that London's Melanesian fiction is his "bitterest Naturalistic writing." And it is true that redeeming values are not overtly presented. Yet one wonders if such a presentation is needed at all. The author's mere portrayal of the horrors of the white man's excesses should elicit a commensurate moral response within the reader. One of the serious weaknesses in many of Jack London's works is that he does heavy-handedly preach to his audience. That he avoids this tendency in "Mauki" and "The Inevitable White Man" is, in my opinion, a strength of the stories.

Finally, McClintock's reference to "perverse sensationalism of the stag-magazine variety" is hyperbolic recognition of a weakness, not only in many of the South Sea Tales, but in Jack London's fictional canon as a whole. As noted in the opening pages of this chapter, London's portrayal of violence, suffering, and death is sometimes excessive, thereby losing its artistic effectiveness. His narratives bear comparison with the motion pictures of

cult-of-violence director Sam Peckinpah (The Wild Bunch, Straw Dogs, The Getaway). Each in his medium tends to weaken his work through a failure to exercise restraint and to edit judiciously.

In point of fact, Jack London does control his proclivity for descriptions of violence and horror in four excellent Polynesian short stories: "The Seed of McCoy," "The House of Pride," "Koolau the Leper," and "The Chinago."⁸² Of these, the latter two are the most overt criticisms of white imperialism to be found in the author's South Sea canon.

"The Seed of McCoy," the last and longest of the South Sea Tales, stands in marked contrast to the preceding stories in this collection, as if in repudiation of the violent, grimly pessimistic vision which informs them. A hint as to the source of this story is found in a passing comment in Charmian London's record of the Snark cruise. Writing early in 1908, she states that while visiting Papeete, Tahiti, "we . . . came to know dear old man McCoy and his kind-hearted daughter--of the McCoys of Pitcairn and the Bounty. Our acquaintance with them was a rare bit of luck for us."⁸³ The nature of this good fortune is not revealed; however, it is safe to assume that the tale which obviously grew from the character of

McCoy and probably from the adventures that he related to London is obliquely referred to here.

The action of "The Seed of McCoy" takes place aboard the Pyrenees, a tall ship whose cargo of wheat is mysteriously afire. When this danger was first discovered, orders were given to seal the ship's hold in an attempt to smother the fire. But these efforts met with little success, for the wheat continued to smolder and threatened to erupt at any moment. Consequently, Captain Davenport, the vessel's competent skipper, made for the nearest landfall, Pitcairn Island, in hopes of beaching the Pyrenees, thereby saving her for possible salvage.

As the narrative opens, the "raging furnace"⁸⁴ of a ship is in sight of Pitcairn, and an aged man, in dungarees and cotton shirt, is coming aboard from his outrigger canoe. He quickly ascertains the situation and identifies himself as McCoy, chief magistrate of Pitcairn and great-grandson of the McCoy of the Bounty. Unfortunately, the news he brings is bad. Pitcairn Island, this most remote spot of human habitation, has no beach, no anchorage. If Davenport attempts to ground her, the Pyrenees will be destroyed.

At this revelation the captain and first mate give up hope, but McCoy's "liquid brown eyes [sweep] over them

like a benediction, soothing them, wrapping them about as in the mantle of a great peace,"⁸⁵ and he agrees to guide the Pyrenees on a dangerous course to possible salvation--a traverse of three hundred miles to the northwest, to Mangareva, where is to be found "a beautiful bed for your ship."⁸⁶

Before setting out McCoy must first go ashore to obtain his people's permission to leave, for it will be many months before he will be able to obtain passage back to Pitcairn. He is granted leave and then returns with food for the nearly starving crew which is on the verge of mutiny. But what he brings is far greater than food for the body. The effect he has on all aboard is hypnotic, almost supernatural, in its efficacy. His voice, which is the "softest and gentlest imaginable,"⁸⁷ conveys a "tremendous certitude of soul,"⁸⁸ a quietude and tranquility, a gentle presence" which "seemed to rebuke and calm them."⁸⁹ With McCoy as pilot the crew is willing to risk putting out to open water again in this "anteroom of hell,"⁹⁰ this "shell filled with conflagration," upon which, "clinging precariously, the little motes of men"⁹¹ battle for survival.

That McCoy is a Christ figure and that the Pyrenees is a microcosm of the human predicament are strongly suggested.

If McCoy's guidance is accepted and his instructions followed to the letter, the Pyrenees will be brought safely to a bed of soft sand; if not, catastrophe will result.

While Captain Davenport wanders the deck "like a lost soul,"⁹² the ship staggers through gales which threaten to turn into hurricanes and gropes through fogs which obscure vision. In the midst of this confusion, McCoy suggests a course alteration of two points. The captain, trusting instead in his own judgment, adjusts course by only a point and a half--and Mangareva slips past on the fog-shrouded sea. Now the Pyrenees must sail on into the Paumotus, the Dangerous Archipelago, so called because its reefs and atolls have claimed thousands of ships.

Subsequent pages record Davenport's nearly hysterical attempts to find a home for his ship. Described as "an excited terrier,"⁹³ he charts course after course only to be frustrated by the fickle currents and shifting winds of the Paumotus. And yet, through it all the Pyrenees remains intact. "It's a miracle," mutters the captain, "the way the old girl's decks hold out. But they can't last. They can't last."⁹⁴

All the while, McCoy looks serenely on, offering no help and leaving Captain Davenport to his own inventions

until the crew, cognizant of its desperate situation, refuses the captain's orders:

They announced that they had had enough of hell-fire under their feet. . . . Their lives amounted to something to them. They had served faithfully the ship, now they were going to serve themselves.

They sprang to the boats, brushing the second and third mates out of the way, and proceeded to swing the boats out and to prepare to lower away. Captain Davenport and the first mate, revolvers in hand, were advancing to the break of the poop, when McCoy, who had climbed on top of the cabin, began to speak.

He spoke to the sailors, and at the first sound of his dovelike, cooing voice they paused to hear. He extended to them his ineffable serenity and peace. His soft voice and simple thoughts flowed out to them in a magic stream, soothing them against their wills. Long forgotten thoughts came back to them. . . . There was no more trouble, no more danger, no more irk, in all the world. Everything was as it should be. . . .

McCoy spoke simply; but it was not what he spoke. It was his personality that spoke more eloquently than any word he could utter. It was an alchemy of soul occultly subtle and profoundly deep--a mysterious emanation of the spirit, seductive, sweetly humble, and terribly imperious. It was illumination in the dark crypts of their souls, a compulsion of purity and gentleness vastly greater than that which resided in the shining death-spitting revolvers of the officers.

The men wavered reluctantly where they stood, and those who had loosed the turns made them fast again. Then one, and then another, and then all of them, began to sidle awkwardly away.⁹⁵

In an ironic reversal, the descendant of a mutineer has prevented a mutiny; and in the hush that descends upon the ship after the threatened revolt, McCoy relates

to the ship's officers a tale of lust and murder, the story of his ancestors, the record of the Bounty crew's early years on Pitcairn. Initially, the Bounty mutineers killed the Tahitian men in their midst and took their women; then they turned on each other: "They were very wicked. God had hidden His face from them."⁹⁶ Only when the first generation had decimated itself did the slaughter cease, and then out of the evil of the Bounty crew a stable society slowly developed, a new order embodied in McCoy himself.

Captain Davenport has listened intently to this narrative, and now, although not a religious man, he feels "a mad impulse to cast himself at the other's feet-- and to say he knew not what. It was an emotion that so deeply stirred him, rather than a coherent thought, and he was aware in some vague way of his own unworthiness and smallness in the presence of this other man. . . ."⁹⁷

The crisis moment of story is now drawing near. With the deck about to burst into flames, McCoy assures the captain that he will stay with him until the end (a sure echo of Christ's promise to his disciples) and directs him to Fakarava Island, for there "is the place for the Pyrenees to find her bed."⁹⁸ The captain obeys and the atoll is reached, but as the difficult passage into its lagoon is attempted, "the amidship deck of the Pyrenees,

in a mass of flame and smoke, [is] flung upward into the sails and rigging. . . ."99 The crew flees to the lifeboats, leaving Captain Davenport alone at the wheel.

"Keep her off half a point, Captain."

Captain Davenport gave a start. He had thought he had the ship to himself.

"Ay, ay; half a point it is," he answered.

Amidships the Pyrenees was an open, flaming furnace. . . . McCoy, in the shelter of the mizzen-shrouds, continued his difficult task of conning the ship through the intricate channel. . . .

Slowly, point by point, as she entered the lagoon, the Pyrenees described the circle that put her before the wind; and point by point, with all the calm certitude of a thousand years of time to spare, McCoy chanted the changing course.

"Another point, Captain."

"A point it is. . . ."

The Pyrenees struck, her bow lifted, and she ground ahead gently to a stop. . . .

McCoy peered over the side. "Soft, white sand. Couldn't ask for better. A beautiful bed."100

McCoy has kept his promise, the captain has obeyed his spiritual pilot, and the Pyrenees has found deliverance.

"And now," says McCoy, as the story ends, "I must see about getting back to Pitcairn."101

A truism of criticism is that naturalists have tended to dramatize violent atavistic reversions rather than evolutions to higher, more complex, more sophisticated states. For example, in London's typical South Sea tale one often sees the facade of civilization and morality

crumble before the necessities of survival. However, in "The Seed of McCoy" the author has rejected his usual bitter pessimism by dramatizing the growth of good out of evil. James I. McClintock, in an accurate analysis of this story, sees this thematic difference between this story and the other South Sea Tales as based upon London's socialism. Herein the writer

is preoccupied with the regeneration of society. According to his dialectical view of history, a corrupt society would consume itself, Phoenix-like, catastrophically, and be reborn purified. McCoy, himself, emerges from an "iniquitous ancestry" since he is "the seed of McCoy," one of the most despicable of the Bounty mutineers. His ancestor, with the others, murdered, raped and eventually destroyed the native and white cultures. . . . From the first McCoy "who was a power for evil in the early days of blood and lust and violent death" when "God had hidden His face," had sprung the Christ-like McCoy who saves the Pyrenees. Parallel to this sub-plot recounted by McCoy is the situation aboard the Pyrenees. The sailors attempt mutiny as the center of their world burns, but a new leader emerges amidst the flames and revitalizes their latent goodness. The men intuitively place their faith in him, just as London places his faith in an ideal social order growing out of evil.¹⁰²

This reading is valuable because it explains the curious utilization of Christian symbolism by a hard-line materialist. This optimistic version of "The Open Boat" is an appealing story, marred only by London's abandonment of his usual economy, sixty-eight pages being far too many to dramatize this theme.

In its lack of physical action and violence, "The House of Pride," the title story of The House of Pride and Other Tales of Hawaii (1912), also stands outside the mainstream of Jack London's South Sea fiction. However, in its implicit criticism of the exploitation of the Polynesian, it is representative of these works.

This story is a character study of its central figure, Percival Ford, one of the powers of Hawaii, who, as the narrative opens, is sitting in isolation amidst a partying multitude. Around him, on the lanai (veranda) of the Seaside Club, under the alagabara trees, and on the beach "with the Southern Cross burning low on the horizon,"¹⁰³ mingles the racial and cultural variety of Hawaii. The occasion is a farewell for the United States Army's Twentieth Division, which is being transferred to Alaska. Ford is there out of a sense of obligation only; for he "could not help knowing the officers and their women. But between knowing and liking was a vast gulf."¹⁰⁴ A straitlaced puritan, he feels distinctly uncomfortable among "these army women, with their bare shoulders and naked arms, their straight-looking eyes, their vitality and challenging femaleness"; and he objects as well to the army men "who took life lightly, drinking and smoking and swearing their way through life and asserting the essential grossness of flesh no less shamelessly than

their women."¹⁰⁵ Lacking "vitality," Ford is a "negative organism,"¹⁰⁶ a thirty-five-year-old bachelor who believes himself to be the moral superior of all around him.

This supercilious sanctimony is a product of heredity and training; for, as the son of Isaac Ford, one of those nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries who brought the New England conscience to Polynesia and stayed to make a million, Percival Ford received both that "commercial soul-saver's"¹⁰⁷ vast wealth and "his meagre blood [which] denied him much of life, and permitted him to be an extremist in one thing only, which thing was righteousness. Over right conduct he pondered and agonized, and that he should do right was as necessary to his nature as loving and being loved were necessary to commoner clay."¹⁰⁸

As Ford looks on and negatively judges "God's plenty," he is joined by Dr. Kennedy, his physician, who orders a scotch and soda for himself and a lemonade for Ford. The conversation which then ensues constitutes the body of the narrative.

A short distance from Kennedy and Ford, a group of Hawaiian musicians is entertaining. One of them is Joe Garland, a Caucasian-Polynesian half-breed whose charm and good nature endear him to all but the austere Percival

Ford. For a moment the two men look on in silence;
then Kennedy asks:

"Look here, Ford, isn't it time you let up on Joe Garland? I understand you are in opposition to the Promotion Committee's sending him to the States on this surf-board proposition. . . . I should have thought you'd be glad to get him out of the country. It would be a good way to end your persecution of him."

"Persecution?" Percival Ford's eyebrows lifted interrogatively.

"Call it by any name you please," Kennedy went on. "You've hounded that poor devil for years. It's not his fault. Even you will admit that."

"Not his fault?" Percival Ford's thin lips drew tightly together for the moment. "Joe Garland is dissolute and idle. He has always been a wastrel, a profligate."¹⁰⁹

As the conversation progresses Kennedy intones a litany of jobs from which, due to Ford's intervention, Joe Garland has been dismissed. To each accusation Ford's defense is the same: from a claimed position of absolute disinterestedness he argues that he must protect those under him from the influence of Joe's immoral living.

By this point, Kennedy has lost his temper, and he then speaks to Ford as few men in the Islands would dare:

"Oh, hold on now, Ford. Don't go harping on that. You are pure New England stock. Joe Garland is half Kanaka. Your blood is thin. His is warm. Life is one thing to you, another

thing to him. He laughs and sings and dances through life, genial, unselfish, childlike, everybody's friend. You go through life like a perambulating prayer-wheel, a friend of nobody but the righteous, and the righteous are those who agree with you as to what is right. And after all, who shall say? You live like an anchorite. Joe Garland lives like a good fellow. Who has extracted the most from life? We are paid to live, you know. When the wages are too meagre we throw up the job, which is the cause, believe me, of all rational suicide. Joe Garland would starve to death on the wages you get from life. You see, he is made differently. So would you starve on his wages, which are singing, and love--"

"Lust, if you will pardon me," was the interruption.¹¹⁰

Ford's intransigence heightens the doctor's irritation until Kennedy states that it is "positively indecent" to "saddle another's fault on Joe Garland."¹¹¹ When Ford claims ignorance of the other's meaning, Kennedy is convinced that he is being intentionally obtuse; therefore, he confronts the great man with the "secret" which the Islands have known for years--Joe Garland is "Isaac Ford's son . . . your brother."¹¹² To his amazement Dr. Kennedy learns that Ford did not know that Garland was his illegitimate half brother. But when Ford looks closely at the half-breed:

Feature after feature flashed up an unmistakable resemblance. Or, rather, it was he who was the wraith of that other full-muscled and generously moulded man. And his features, and the other man's features, were all reminiscent of Isaac Ford. And nobody had told him.¹¹³

When the doctor's accusation is confirmed by a trepidant servant, the edifice of Percival Ford's life begins to crumble: "He was appalled by what was in his blood. It was like learning suddenly that his father had been a leper and that his own blood might bear the taint of that dread disease. Isaac Ford, the austere soldier of the Lord--the old hypocrite! What difference between him and any beach-comber? The house of pride that Percival Ford had builded was tumbling about his ears."¹¹⁴

Now, with Dr. Kennedy departed, Ford sits alone for hours, head in hands, in the midst of the gaiety around him. He believes that he is praying, while actually he is rationalizing, patching

together his shattered ideal of Isaac Ford, and for cement he [uses] a cunning and subtle logic. It was of the sort that is compounded in the brain laboratories of egotists, and it worked. It was incontrovertible that his father had been made of finer clay than those about him; but still, old Isaac had been only in the process of becoming, while he, Percival Ford, had become. As proof of it, he rehabilitated his father and at the same time exalted himself. His lean little ego waxed to colossal proportions. He was great enough to forgive. He glowed at the thought of it. Isaac Ford had been great, but he was greater, for he could forgive Isaac Ford and even restore him to the holy place in his memory, though the place was not quite so holy as it had been. Also, he applauded Isaac Ford for having ignored the outcome of his one step aside. Very well, he, too, would ignore it.¹¹⁵

In the chill of his egotism, Percival Ford bears comparison with Henry James's self-centered "gentlemen," such as John Marcher and Gilbert Osmond. Any injustice he has done or will do to his brother is obscured by his obsession with protecting his self-image. And to do so, he must banish the embodiment of his father's indiscretion. He summons his brother, hears the truth from him, and offers him a lifetime pension if he will leave Hawaii forever. At this insult,

all the awkwardness and embarrassment disappeared from Joe Garland. Birth and station were bridged and reversed.

"You want me to go?" he demanded.

"I want you to go and never to come back," Percival Ford answered.

And in that moment, flashing and fleeting, it was given him to see his brother tower above him like a mountain, and to feel himself dwindle and dwarf to microscopic insignificance. But it is not well for one to see himself truly, nor can one so see himself for long and live; and only for that flashing moment did Percival Ford see himself and his brother in true perspective. The next moment he was mastered by his meagre and insatiable ego.¹¹⁶

Like Spencer Brydon in James's "The Jolly Corner," Ford glimpses the truth about himself and cannot accept it.

Realizing now that his brother will only redouble his persecution, Joe Garland agrees to go, but spurns the money offered. The story ends as it began: Percival Ford sits alone, an island in the merriment, as he sips lemonade and smiles contentedly to himself.

While it must be recognized that "The House of Pride" skirts the realm of soap opera melodrama, London manages to avoid its excesses and is thereby able to dramatize effectively an evil more subtle and sophisticated than that presented in his typical tale of violence. Also, he is able to convey obliquely his criticism of the white man's exploitation of the Polynesian, for Ford's abuse of Joe Garland is symbolic of the Caucasians' treatment of their brown brothers throughout the South Pacific.

Finally, the theme inherent in the conflicting temperaments of Percival Ford and Joe Garland--the grim puritan vision of the white man and the relatively innocent, fun-loving hedonism of the Polynesian--so fascinated Jack London that he was to return to it eight years later in the title story of On the Makaloa Mat (to be discussed in the next chapter). It was especially that openness to life and pleasure which the author embodied in Joe Garland (obviously a tag-name) that forced him to revise his racial attitudes, at least toward this "lesser breed," and made him mourn the inevitable passing of the pure blooded Hawaiian. In "My Hawaiian Aloha," an essay published the month of his death, London wrote that

the old chief-stocks and royal stocks are half-whites, three-quarters whites, and seven-eighths whites. And they and their children continue to marry whites, or seven-eighths and three-quarters whites like themselves, so that the Hawaiian strain grows thinner and thinner against the day when it will vanish in thin air. All of which is a pity, for the world can ill afford to lose so splendid and lovable a race.¹¹⁷

Martin Johnson in Through the South Seas With Jack London and Charmian London in Jack London and Hawaii both record the genesis of "Koolau the Leper."¹¹⁸ Bert Stolz, a collegiate member of the Snark's crew and son of a sheriff on Hawaii's "Garden Island," Kauai, related to the others how years before his father had been killed by a desperate leper who was resisting deportation to Molokai. From this incident London developed "Koolau the Leper," in which he combined the subject of leprosy with the themes of the struggle of the individual against overwhelming odds and white exploitation of the Polynesian. As mentioned previously, London took diametrically opposed views of "natural" man in the South Seas: "the flower-garlanded, golden-glowing men and maids of Polynesia, half children and half gods; and . . . the howling savages of Melanesia, head hunters and man eaters, half devil and all beast."¹¹⁹ The physical attractiveness and good nature of the Polynesians put Jack London's racial convictions under a severe strain, and his obvious inability

to view the decimation of this people with the scientific objectivity he tried to achieve in the "Typee" chapter of The Cruise of the Snark is clearly evidenced.

In rocky cathedrals above Kauhi's spectacularly beautiful Kalalau Valley, Koolau leads a group of lepers, "in face and form grotesque caricatures of everything human,"¹²⁰ who hold out against civil and military authority that intends to incarcerate them on Molokai. The plight of this little band forms a microcosm of race relations on the Hawaiian Islands as a whole. In appealing to his followers to continue the struggle, Koolau summarizes the clash of races in these words:

"They [white men] came like lambs, speaking softly. . . . They were of two kinds. The one kind asked our permission, our gracious permission, to preach us the word of God. They asked our permission, our gracious permission, to trade with us. That was the beginning. To-day all the islands are theirs, all the land, all the cattle--everything is theirs. They that preached the word of God and they that preached the word of Rum have foregathered and become great chiefs. . . . They who had nothing have everything, and if you, or I, or any Kanaka be hungry, they sneer and say, 'Well, why don't you work? There are the plantations.'"¹²¹

Even Koolau's leprosy is the product of the white man's greed, for "they brought the Chinese slaves [to work the sugar-cane fields] from over the seas. And with them came the Chinese sickness--that which we suffer from and

because of which they would imprison us on Molokai."¹²²
 Within the context of the story, it is irrelevant that the common good demands the removal of the lepers; for while recognizing the rightness of the white man's actions, the reader sees "the leper's struggle against the disintegration of his band and his own body" as "another metaphor of the London rebel's war with a world which threatens every moment to betray and engulf him."¹²³

First the sheriff (Stolz's father) attempts to take the lepers and he and many policemen fall before Koolau's Mauser; then come soldiers with artillery to pound the lepers from their crevices and caves. Eventually his followers surrender and betray Koolau; however, he escapes, still refusing to bow to the will of the inevitable white man, whose tenacity he finds incomprehensible:

Koolau . . . lay and marvelled at the strange persistence of these haoles who would have their will though the sky fell in. Aye, they would have their will over all men and all things, even though they died in getting it. He could not but admire them, too, what of that will in them that was stronger than life and that bent all things to their bidding. He was convinced of the hopelessness of his struggle. There was no gainsaying that terrible will of the haoles. Though he killed a thousand, yet would they rise like the sands of the sea and come upon him. . . . They never knew when they were beaten. That was their fault and their virtue. It was where his own kind lacked. He could see, now, how the preachers of God and the preachers of Rum had conquered the land.¹²⁴

Yet the will of this Polynesian is stronger than that of the white man. Firing so rapidly that the heated barrel of his rifle burns into the nerveless flesh of his hands, Koolau extracts a fearsome toll. After six weeks of fruitless maneuver, the soldiers depart, leaving Koolau as master of jungle and mountain side. For two more years the leper survives until the ravages of exposure and disease end the tragedy:

For the last time, Koolau crawled unto a thicket and lay down among the ti-leaves and wild ginger blossoms. Free he had lived, and free he was dying. A slight drizzle of rain began to fall, and he drew a ragged blanket about the distorted wreck of his limbs. . . .

Like a wild animal he had crept into hiding to die. Half-conscious, aimless and wandering, he lived back into his life to his early manhood on Niihau. As life faded and the drip of the rain grew dim in his ears, it seemed to him that he was once more in the thick of the horse-breaking, with raw colts rearing and bucking under him, his stirrups tied together beneath, or charging madly about the breaking corral and driving the helping cowboys over the rail. . . .

All his lusty, whole-bodied youth was his, until the sharp pangs of impending dissolution brought him back. He lifted his monstrous hands and gazed at them in wonder. But how? Why? Then he remembered, and once again, and for a moment, he was Koolau the leper. His eyelids fluttered wearily down and the drip of the rain ceased in his ears. A prolonged trembling set up in his body. This, too, ceased. He half-lifted his head, but it fell back. Then his eyes opened, and did not close. His last thought was of his Mauser, and he pressed it against his chest with his folded, fingerless hands. 125

It was passages such as this that H. L. Mencken had in mind when he wrote that London had "a vast delicacy of perception, a high feeling, a sensitiveness to beauty. And there was in him, too, under all his blatantries, a poignant sense of the infinite romance and mystery of human life."¹²⁶ "Koolau the Leper," a tale which "escapes the liabilities of sentimentality and rises above mere social comment"¹²⁷ is the author's tribute to the unconquerable spirit of the underdog who finds in violence his means of asserting his freedom and individuality.

An interesting contrast to "Koolau the Leper" is "The Chinago,"¹²⁸ another of London's finest stories. Instead of positing as protagonist a dominant white man or a heroic member of the lesser breeds, the author builds this, his most scathing condemnation of white imperialism, around Ah Cho, a meek twenty-two-year-old Chinese coolie. The setting is Tahiti, where Ah Cho is serving a five-year indenture on an English cotton plantation--his pay, fifty cents a day, Mexican.

What if the work were hard? At the end of the five years he would return home--that was in the contract--and he would never have to work again. He would be a rich man for life, with a house of his own, a wife, and children growing up to venerate him. Yes, and back of the house he would have a small garden, a place of meditation and repose, with goldfish in a tiny lakelet, and wind bells tinkling in the several trees, and there would be a high wall all around so that his meditation and repose should be undisturbed.¹²⁹

Ah Cho's misfortune is to be present when another coolie is murdered. When the Chinese witnesses refuse to name the killer, all claiming ignorance, the French court arbitrarily finds them guilty of murder and sentences four, including Ah Cho, to prison on New Caledonia. In a display of Alice in Wonderland logic, the magistrate determines that Ah Chow, the fifth man, is to be beheaded, because when Karl Schemmer, the brutish German overseer, had come upon the murder scene, he had struck out at the Chinagos (the Polynesians' name for the Chinese) with his belt. Since "Ah Chow's face [had] been most severely bruised by Schemmer's strap . . . his identification" was positive, and "since one man must die, he might as well be that man."¹³⁰

With Oriental resignation Ah Cho accepts his twenty-year sentence:

By that much was his garden removed from him-- that was all. He was young, and the patience of Asia was in his bones. He could wait those twenty years, and by that time the heats of his blood would be assuaged and he would be better fitted for that garden of calm delight. He thought of a name for it; he would call it The Garden of the Morning Calm. He was made happy all day by the thought, and he was inspired to devise a moral maxim on the virtue of patience. . . .¹³¹

However, his philosophical acceptance of fate is given the ultimate test when the chief justice's

hangover causes him to leave the final letter off the name on the execution order. "Ah Chow" becomes "Ah Cho," but "it was only a Chinago's life he was signing away, anyway."¹³²

Although Ah Cho protests and his executioners recognize the error, they determine to carry out the killing for practical considerations: Cruchot, the gendarme, doesn't want to delay his visit to "Berthe, the pretty half-caste daughter of Lafière, the pearl-trader";¹³³ and Schemmer doesn't want any delay that will cost the company money, for he has assembled the plantation workers to view this exercise of white man's justice. "Look here . . . we can't postpone this affair. I've lost three hours' work already out of those five hundred Chinagos. I can't afford to lose it all over again for the right man. Let's put the performance through just the same. It's only a Chinago."¹³⁴

In this short story Jack London brings together French civil authority, English commercial interests, and German brutality and efficiency to dramatize that western civilization is the villain. While "embracing the Kiplingesque doctrine of Anglo-Saxon law and rule over what were condescendingly called 'the lesser breeds without the law,' London also felt compelled to criticize the inhuman results of that system's conquest and operation."¹³⁵ Nowhere does London convey that criticism

more effectively than in "The Chinago," whose conclusion is demonstrative of the author's prose at its best:

The overseer threatened him with a clenched fist, and he remained silent. What was the good of protesting? Those foreign devils always had their way. He allowed himself to be lashed to the vertical board that was the size of his body. Schemmer drew the buckles tight--so tight that the straps cut into his flesh and hurt. But he did not complain. The hurt would not last long. He felt the board tilting over in the air toward the horizontal, and closed his eyes. And in that moment he caught a glimpse of his garden of meditation and repose. It seemed to him that he sat in the garden. A cool wind was blowing, and the bells in the several trees were tinkling softly. Also, birds were making sleepy noises, and from beyond the high wall came the subdued sound of village life.

Then he was aware that the board had come to rest, and from muscular pressures and tensions he knew that he was lying on his back. He opened his eyes. Straight above him he saw the suspended knife blazing in the sunshine. He saw the weight which had been added, and noted that one of Schemmer's knots had slipped. Then he heard the sergeant's voice in sharp command. Ah Cho closed his eyes hastily. He did not want to see that knife descend. But he felt it--for one great fleeting instant. And in that instant he remembered Cruchot and what Cruchot had said. But Cruchot was wrong. The knife did not tickle. That much he knew before he ceased to know.¹³⁶

King Hendricks has praised London's building of atmosphere, use of narrative technique, and development of irony in "The Chinago," which he evaluates as "the greatest story of London's career and one of the greatest stories of all time."¹³⁷ While this tale may not belong

in the pantheon of immortal short stories, it is a quality product worthy of respect. And a major contributing factor to this excellence is the author's restraint in his use of violence, which emphasizes its institutionalized character, impersonal and totally beyond the victim's ability to resist. Herein lies its true horror. Curiously, by walking away from the violent detail found in "Mauki" and "The Inevitable White Man," Jack London created the effect he hoped to achieve in those stories.

To shift this discussion from "The Chinago" to Jack London's novels of the South Pacific is to move from quality to hack work. Adventure and Jerry of the Islands¹³⁸ are among the most artistically unsuccessful of his extended narratives, illustrative of his fiction at its worst. While set in the Solomon Islands, they are in reality failures of the author to dig out a little more gold from exhausted Northland mines. Adventure is (to mix one's metaphors) "a warmed-over version of A Daughter of the Snows,"¹³⁹ London's first novel, and Jerry of the Islands is his unsuccessful attempt to create another dog story of the calibre of The Call of the Wild and White Fang. However, consideration of at least one of them, Adventure, is necessary as it is the

most graphic example of the ugly side of London's theories of race and violence untempered by ethical concerns.

According to Charmian London, Adventure, like the majority of the South Sea narratives, is based on characters and experiences of the Snark cruise. It was begun while the London's were visiting Pennduffryn Plantation on Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, which serves as the setting for this novel.¹⁴⁰ The heroine, possessing characteristics the author saw in Charmian, is a Hawaiian-born American named Joan Lackland. She is a pre-World War I liberated woman more comfortable with a .38 Colt than a cup of tea in her hand, yet she has "advanced" ideas regarding the humane treatment of the South Seas' native populations. With her entourage of "picturesque" Tahitian sailors (set in ironic contrast to the Melane-sians), she arrives at Berande Plantation, nurses its stricken owner David Sheldon back to health, and becomes his partner in turning the plantation into a successful operation. London relates their numerous adventures among the headhunters and ends the novel with Sheldon's winning her hand by vanquishing the story's villain in a jungle duel.

The above summary only hints at the hodgepodge nature of Adventure. It is a mixture of Snark experiences, superwoman concepts first embodied in Frona Welse of

A Daughter of the Snows (1902), an unbelievable adventure-love story, and racist malarkey that quite naturally fails to coalesce. Begun while he was suffering severely from his numerous tropical ailments, depressed at the prospect of terminating the voyage, and faced with mounting financial worries, Adventure is, in Professor Labor's apt phrase, "knee-jerk fiction."¹⁴¹

In The Log of the Snark Charmian London comments that "Jack practically never writes of experiences while he is in the thick of them. He waits; he gains perspective and atmosphere through time. He is the artist, the painter. . . ."¹⁴² It is unfortunate that he did not adhere to that strategy in the writing of Adventure. A better novel could have been produced, but probably not a first-rate one. With the conspicuous exception of the novella The Call of the Wild, London's extended narratives display debilitating construction problems. "A born sprinter who never acquired the artistic stamina of the long distance runner," London's "basic technical weaknesses . . . were chronic: his longer plots tend to be episodic and disjointed; his dialogue is strained; and his characters often degenerate into caricatures because they are stretched flat on ideological frames."¹⁴³

These problems are evident in Adventure, but what is relevant to this discussion and which most disturbs the reader is the novel's racist propaganda in praise of the white man and in condemnation of the Melanesian. Approximately two dozen metaphors, predominantly simian, are used by the omniscient narrator to describe the blacks. The "woolly-headed black skinned" savages, "greasy and dirty and naked," are "ugly and apelike"; they move with the "automatic swiftness of a wild animal" and attack the white man "like ravening wolves."¹⁴⁴ In the novel's opening paragraph, David Sheldon, suffering from tropical fever, literally rides his Melanesian "man-horse" as he makes his rounds of the plantation hospital.

"As sure as God didn't make the Solomons," the blackness of the Melanesians reflects their evil nature and the character of the Solomons as a whole. In opposition is the armed white man, alone against the darkness of which the Melanesians are the personification; he dominates the landscape of Adventure. For example, in the opening chapter which records a day on Berande Plantation, David Sheldon's racial mastery is emphasized, but he is never named--he is merely the white man.

The full moon rose over Malaita and shone down on Berande. Nothing stirred in the windless air. From the hospital still proceeded the

moaning of the sick. In the grass-thatched barracks nearly two hundred woolly-headed man-eaters slept off the weariness of the day's toil, though several lifted their heads to listen to the curses of one who cursed the white man, who never slept. On the four verandas of the house, the lanterns burned. Inside, between rifle and revolver, the man himself moaned and tossed in intervals of troubled sleep.¹⁴⁵

Time after time London creates melodramatic scenes in which the inevitable white man's strength of character and purpose triumphs over the "moral" weakness of the blacks, whom he realizes would "sooner or later . . . get him, if he did not get them first, if he did not once again sear on their dark souls the flaming mastery of the white man."¹⁴⁶

Facing them, clinging to the railing of the veranda for support, stood the sick white man. Any one of them could have knocked him over with a blow of a little finger. Despite his firearms, the gang could have rushed him and delivered that blow, then his head and the plantation would have been theirs. Hatred and murder and lust for revenge they possessed to overflowing. But one thing they lacked, the thing that he possessed,--the flame of mastery that would not quench, that burned fiercely as ever in the disease-wasted body, and that was ever ready to flare forth and scorch and singe them with its ire.¹⁴⁷

When Joan Lackland, a naive romantic in David Sheldon's opinion, questions his treatment of the plantation laborers ("They are human beings . . . and amenable

to reason."¹⁴⁸), she and the reader receive a lecture on the differences between the "lesser breeds" and the necessary means of controlling them:

"You see, you don't understand the situation . . . the blacks have to be ruled sternly. Kindness is all very well but you can't rule them by kindness only. I accept all that you say about the Hawaiians and Tahitians. . . . But you have no experience with the blacks. . . . They are different from your natives. You are used to Polynesians. These boys are Melanesians. They're blacks. They're niggers--look at their kinky hair. And they're a whole lot lower than the African niggers. . . .

"They possess no gratitude, no sympathy, no kindliness. If you are kind to them, they think you are a fool. If you are gentle with them, they think you are afraid."¹⁴⁹

Such discourses, spiced with bloody tales of black treachery, change the heroine's opinion of the Melanesians and Sheldon's treatment of them. Consequently, she too becomes a mouthpiece for London's singular blending of heroic romanticism and naturalistic inevitability that constitutes his theory of white supremacy:

Joan nodded but remained silent. She was . . . occupied in glimpsing the vision of the one lone white man as she had first seen him, helpless from fever, a collapsed wraith in a steamer chair, who, up to the last heart-beat, by some strange alchemy of race, was pledged to mastery.

"It is a pity," she said. "But the white man has to rule, I suppose. . . ."

"Blind destiny of race," she said, faintly smiling. "We whites have been land-robbers and sea-robbers from the remotest time. It is in our blood . . . and we can't get away from it."¹⁵⁰

Once again, the smug explanation relieves one of moral responsibility, and the characters are "stretched flat on ideological frames," as they mouth the theories of Spencer and Kidd.

"But it will never become a white man's climate . . . ," Joan reiterated. "The white men will always be unable to perform the manual labor."

"That is true."

"It will mean slavery," she dashed on.

"Yes, like all the tropics. The black, the brown, and the yellow will have to do the work, managed by the white men. The black labor is too wasteful, however, and in time Chinese or Indian coolies will be imported. The planters are already considering the matter. I, for one, am heartily sick of black labor."

"Then the blacks will die off?"

Sheldon shrugged his shoulders and retorted:

"Yes, like the North American Indian, who was a far nobler type than the Melanesian. The world is only so large, you know, and it is filling up--"

"And the unfit must perish?"

"Precisely so. The unfit must perish."¹⁵¹

London's message is unequivocal: "it was the destiny [of the white man] ever to stand on this high place, looking down on the unending hordes of black trouble that required control, bullying, and cajolery."¹⁵² Within the context of Adventure, the author fails to use

irony or any other form of implicit criticism to undercut or question the sociological-philosophical premises which carried to their logical conclusion were to lead to Buchenwald and Dachau. In "Koolau the Leper" and "The Chinago" he was explicit in his criticism, and even in such violently brutal tales as "Yah! Yah! Yah!" and "The Inevitable White Man," which appear to praise the whites, tone and oblique comment indicated London's recognition of the evil consequences of racist imperialism and the reality of individual responsibility. James I. McClintock has condemned most of London's South Sea fiction for enthroning as "collective hero . . . the brutal white man who asserts his racial 'inevitability' and matches savagery with savagery by exploiting the natives. Race theory found in the Alaskan stories has turned in racism."¹⁵³ While this judgment is undeniably true of Adventure, it is not, in my opinion, applicable to the other narratives discussed in this chapter. When at his best Jack London utilized violence and race in dramatizing his basic naturalistic vision of life as struggle in a world dominated by predatory individuals and races, while paradoxically maintaining and conveying his recognition of individual moral responsibility. Although there was much confusion in his attitudes toward race, usually London calls upon the reader to condemn the exploitation

of the South Sea islanders. Adventure, a novel written while he was under great physical and emotional stress, should not be held up as representative either of the man or his art.

The following chapter, which will concentrate on Jack London's last short story collection On the Makaloa Mat, will reveal a seldom recognized facet of the author's achievement. It will demonstrate his sublimation of violence as he strove to find something to believe in beyond a pessimistic determinism. In these stories, the contrasts between races are emphasized once again--but the survival-of-the-fittest doctrine, the theory of racial mastery, the test motif inherent in physical conflict, and the other sources of violence analyzed in this chapter are relegated to minor roles as his work gains in complexity. The resultant contrast between Jack London's early and late tales of the South Pacific is one of the most interesting aspects of any study of the author's South Sea narratives.

NOTES

- ¹ Labor, Jack London, p. 131.
- ² Charmian London, The Log of the Snark (New York: Macmillan Co., 1915), p. 90.
- ³ Jack London, Jerry of the Islands, 1st ed. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1917; rpt. London: T. Werner Laurie Ltd., 1937), p. v.
- ⁴ Jerry, p. v.
- ⁵ Jack London, "These Bones Shall Rise Again," in Revolution and Other Essays (New York: Macmillan Co., 1912), pp. 233-234.
- ⁶ "There is no end of Kipling in my work. I have even quoted him. I would never possibly have written anywhere near the way I did had Kipling never been." Quoted by Andrew Sinclair, Jack, p. 73.
- ⁷ "To Cloudesley Johns," 7 March 1899, Letters, p. 20.
- ⁸ Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1956), p. 87.
- ⁹ Maxwell Geismar, Introduction, Jack London: Short Stories (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), p. ix.
- ¹⁰ George Orwell, "Introduction to Love of Life and Other Stories by Jack London," in The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, v. IV (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), p. 27.
- ¹¹ F. W. Pattee, The Development of the American Short Story (New York: Harper and Row, 1923), p. 351.
- ¹² See Jack London, "Typhoon Off the Coast of Japan," in Jack London's Tales of Adventure, ed. Irving Shephard (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1956), pp. 54-57.

13 Jack London, "The House of Mapuhi," McClure's Magazine, 32 (January 1909), 247-260. Collected in South Sea Tales, 1st ed. (Macmillan, 1911; rpt. Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1946), pp. 3-58.

Jack London, "The Pearls of Parley," The Saturday Evening Post, 184 (October 14, 1911), 9-11, 64-66. Collected in A Son of the Sun, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1912; rpt. London: George Newnes, Ltd., n.d.), pp. 215-254.

14 South Sea Tales, p. 7.

15 South Sea Tales, p. 12.

16 South Sea Tales, p. 17.

17 South Sea Tales, p. 23.

18 South Sea Tales, p. 29.

19 South Sea Tales, pp. 29-30.

20 South Sea Tales, pp. 33-35.

21 A Son of the Sun, p. 251.

22 Howard Lachtman, "The Wide World of Jack London" (Diss. University of the Pacific, 1974), pp. 102-104.

23 A Son of the Sun, pp. 238-239.

24 Eugene Burdick, Introduction, The Best Short Stories of Jack London (New York: Fawcett World Library, 1967), p. vii.

25 Within the confines of the short story, London's great gift--that of the natural storyteller--usually negates the problems created by this inner confusion. However, the author's novels are not so fortunate, The Sea-Wolf and Martin Eden being the best examples of works split apart on the rocks of philosophical contradiction. As Arthur Calder-Marshall has stated:

Jack London is in an especial sense a tragic writer. His tragedy is that though he had genius, he never developed the values which would have allowed that genius full expression.

It is an explosive force bursting beyond the limits [those of philosophical materialism] which he imposed upon himself and constantly destroying the limited aims which he consciously imposed.

Arthur Calder-Marshall, Introduction, The Bodley Head Jack London, v. I (London: The Bodley Head, 1963), p. 12.

²⁶ Jack London, "The Yellow Peril" in Revolution and Other Essays (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1910), p. 269.

²⁷ Quoted by Joan London, Jack London and His Times (New York: Doubleday, 1939), p. 212.

²⁸ "To Cloudesley Johns," 17 April 1899, Letters, p. 27.

²⁹ "To Cloudesley Johns," Letters, 5 July, 1899, p. 44.

³⁰ "The Yellow Peril," p. 285.

³¹ Thomas F. Gossett, Race: The History of an Idea in America (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), p. 198.

³² Quoted by Edmund Morris, The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt (New York: Coward, McCoun & Geoghegan, Inc., 1979), p. 464. In all fairness to Roosevelt, it should be recognized that he was not a racist, but rather a strong believer in the cultural superiorities of peoples. He could praise the Japanese while dismissing the Chinese. Skin pigmentation was irrelevant.

For other examples of the pervasiveness of the concept of racial superiority see Barbara W. Tuchman, The Proud Tower (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), p. 153.

³³ "The briefest survey of Jack London's essays, personal letters and interviews yields a mass of internal evidence linking his convictions so closely to those of Benjamin Kidd that one cannot but conclude that the effect on his thinking of Social Evolution . . . was profound."

Joan London, Jack London and His Times, p. 211

34 Benjamin Kidd, Social Evolution (New York: Macmillan Co., 1894), p. 263.

35 Kidd, Social Evolution, p. 304.

36 Gossett, p. 205.

37 Roy W. Carlson, "Jack London's Heroes: A Study of Evolutionary Thought" (Diss. University of New Mexico, 1961), p. 40.

38 Carlson, p. 41.

39 Benjamin Kidd, The Control of the Tropics (New York: Macmillan Co., 1893), p. 52.

40 Kidd's debt to Herbert Spencer is obvious:

Slowly, but surely, evolution brings about an increasing amount of happiness: all evils being but incidental. By its essential nature, the process must everywhere produce greater fitness to the conditions of existence be they what they may. Applying alike to the lowest and the highest forms of organization, there is in all cases a progressive adaptation, and a survival of the most adapted.

Herbert Spencer, Principles of Biology (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1870), p. 354.

41 Robert B. Holland, "Jack London: His Thought and Art in Relation to His Times" (Diss. University of Wisconsin, 1950), p. 259.

42 "The Yellow Peril," p. 288.

43 Joseph Conrad, Tales of Land and Sea (Garden City, N. Y.: Hanover House, 1953), p. 37.

44 Jack London, "Mauki," Hampton's Magazine, 23 (December 1909), 752-760. Collected in South Sea Tales, pp. 83-120.

45 Martin Johnson, Through the South Seas With Jack London, 1st ed. (Dodd, Mead, 1913; rpt. Cedar Springs, Mich.: Wolf House Books, 1972), p. 319.

- 46 Charmian London, The Log of the Snark, p. 445.
- 47 South Sea Tales, p. 89.
- 48 South Sea Tales, pp. 90-91.
- 49 South Sea Tales, p. 93.
- 50 South Sea Tales, p. 86.
- 51 South Sea Tales, p. 96. This incident of cannibalism was based on fact. Captain Jansen recounted for London how "thirteen boys ran away in a stolen whale-boat from Ysabel plantation and during their voyage to Malaita killed a Guadalcanal boy, and one other who were with them. . . ." Charmian London, The Log of the Snark, p. 405.
- 52 South Sea Tales, p. 103.
- 53 South Sea Tales, pp. 102-103.
- 54 South Sea Tales, pp. 111-112.
- 55 South Sea Tales, p. 115.
- 56 South Sea Tales, p. 118.
- 57 Lachtman, "The Wide World of Jack London," p. 79.
- 58 Jack London, "Yah! Yah! Yah!" Columbian Magazine, 3 (December 1910), 439-447. Collected in South Sea Tales, pp. 121-150.
- 59 In The Log of the Snark (p. 457), Charmian London comments:

On our walk to-day, we found the breath of this coral band [Lord Howe Island] to be not more than three hundred yards at the widest, and could realise how easy it must have been for the first white men who came here to subjugate the natives. . . . They fought well and bravely, but learned their bloody and heartbreaking lesson, and the entire population of the atoll is as peaceable as we see them here. The story of their trimming by the 'inevitable white man' is so stirring that Jack will add it also to his collection, calling it 'Yah! Yah! Yah!'. . . .

60 South Sea Tales, p. 123.

61 South Sea Tales, pp. 125-126. Once again the author built upon fact and historical incidents. In October, 1908, the Londons were on the island of Tasman and met there "Mr. McNicholl, a small, hard-bitten Scotsman, who holds power of life and death over the rapidly diminishing handful of almost pure Polynesians on this privately-owned island." And while strolling through the island's cemetery they commented on "all the copper and hardware that had been taken from two New England whale-ships that the once adventuresome people of Tasman had 'cut out' more than a century ago" and which now decorated the tombs. Charmian London, The Log of the Snark, pp. 463, 466.

62 South Sea Tales, p. 142.

63 South Sea Tales, p. 136.

64 Jack London, "My Hawaiian Aloha" (First published in three parts in Cosmopolitan Magazine, September, October, November 1916; rpt. Jack London Reports, eds. King Hendricks & Irving Shephard (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1970), pp. 382-383.

65 South Sea Tales, p. 108.

66 Quoted by Edmund Morris, The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt, p. 464.

67 Kidd, The Control of the Tropics, pp. 50-51.

68 Jack London, "A Son of the Sun" in A Son of the Sun, p. 14.

69 Jack London, "The Inevitable White Man," The Black Cat, 16 (November 1910), 1-10. Collected in South Sea Tales, pp. 235-258.

70 South Sea Tales, p. 235.

71 South Sea Tales, p. 236.

72 South Sea Tales, p. 236.

73 South Sea Tales, pp. 238-239

- 74 South Sea Tales, p. 242.
- 75 South Sea Tales, p. 246.
- 76 South Sea Tales, pp. 248-249.
- 77 South Sea Tales, pp. 249-251.
- 78 South Sea Tales, p. 255.
- 79 McClintock, p. 134.
- 80 South Sea Tales, p. 240.
- 81 McClintock, pp. 134-135.
- 82 Jack London, "The Seed of McCoy," The Century Magazine, 77 (April 1909), 898-914. Collected in South Sea Tales, pp. 259-327.
- "The House of Pride," The Pacific Monthly, 24 (December 1910), 598-607. Collected in The House of Pride and Other Tales of Hawaii (New York: Macmillan Co., 1912), pp. 3-46.
- "Koolau the Leper," The Pacific Monthly, 22 (December 1909), 569-578. Collected in The House of Pride, pp. 47-94.
- "The Chinago," Harper's Monthly Magazine, 119 (July 1909), 233-240. Collected in When God Laughs and Other Stories (New York: Macmillan Co., 1911), pp. 155-185.
- 83 Charmian London, The Log of the Snark, p. 180.
- 84 South Sea Tales, p. 260.
- 85 South Sea Tales, pp. 260-261.
- 86 South Sea Tales, p. 267.
- 87 South Sea Tales, p. 262.
- 88 South Sea Tales, p. 277.
- 89 South Sea Tales, p. 269.
- 90 South Sea Tales, p. 268.

- 91 South Sea Tales, pp. 281-282.
- 92 South Sea Tales, p. 283.
- 93 South Sea Tales, pp. 290-291.
- 94 South Sea Tales, p. 296.
- 95 South Sea Tales, pp. 305-306.
- 96 South Sea Tales, p. 310.
- 97 South Sea Tales, p. 314.
- 98 South Sea Tales, p. 316.
- 99 South Sea Tales, p. 320.
- 100 South Sea Tales, pp. 321-323, 325.
- 101 South Sea Tales, p. 327.
- 102 McClintock, pp. 136-137.
- 103 The House of Pride, p. 7.
- 104 The House of Pride, p. 3.
- 105 The House of Pride, pp. 4-5.

Charmian London records that when she and the author returned to Hawaii in 1915, they

found a silly impression persisting among the charming Army women.

"Your husband does not like us," they voiced their belief. "He made derogatory remarks about Army women in 'The House of Pride.'"

Jack fairly sizzled. . . . "Because I have a bloodless, sexless, misanthropic, misogynistic, misogynist disapprove of décolleté and dancing, and all and every other social diversion and characteristic, I myself am saddled with these unnatural peculiarities. A hell of a lot of interesting characters there would be in fiction if they all talked alike and agreed with one another and their author!"

Charmian London, Jack London and Hawaii (London: Mills and Boone, 1918), p. 276. Published as Our Hawaii (New York: Macmillan, 1917).

- 106 The House of Pride, p. 6.
- 107 The House of Pride, p. 10.
- 108 The House of Pride, p. 7.
- 109 The House of Pride, pp. 14-15.
- 110 The House of Pride, pp. 20-21.
- 111 The House of Pride, p. 23.
- 112 The House of Pride, p. 24.
- 113 The House of Pride, pp. 26-27.
- 114 The House of Pride, pp. 36-37.
- 115 The House of Pride, pp. 37-38.
- 116 The House of Pride, pp. 41-42.
- 117 Jack London Reports, p. 397.
- 118 Martin Johnson, p. 77.

Charmian London, Jack London and Hawaii, p. 41.

- 119 "A Son of the Sun," A Son of the Sun, p. 23.
- 120 The House of Pride, p. 50.
- 121 The House of Pride, pp. 47-48. The majority of the stories in The House of Pride collection contain such criticism of the white man. The "missionary class," descendants of the first Christian missionaries, are pilloried with particular vehemence as in the title story.
- 122 The House of Pride, p. 54.
- 123 Lachtman, "The Wide World of Jack London," p. 78.
- 124 The House of Pride, pp. 83-84. The idea expressed in this passage is not limited to London's South Sea fiction. It appears in one of his great Northland stories "The League of Old Men," collected in Children of the Frost (1902).

- 125 The House of Pride, pp. 89-91.
- 126 H. L. Mencken, "Jack London," Prejudices: First Series (New York: Knopf, 1919), p. 239.
- 127 McClintock, p. 137.
- 128 "Before going to bed on the night of the 25th [April, 1908, between Bora Bora and Samoa], Jack read to us his latest story, 'The Chinago,' the scene of which was laid in Fapeete." Johnson, p. 233.
- 129 When God Laughs, p. 159.
- 130 When God Laughs, p. 166.
- 131 When God Laughs, pp. 167-168.
- 132 When God Laughs, p. 169.
- 133 When God Laughs, p. 181.
- 134 When God Laughs, pp. 181-182.
- 135 Lachtman, p. 73.
- 136 When God Laughs, pp. 184-185.
- 137 King Hendricks, Jack London: Master Craftsman of the Short Story (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1966), p. 24.
- 138 Jack London, Adventure. Serialized in The Popular Magazine (November 1, 1910-January 15, 1911). Book Publication: The Macmillan Co., March, 1911; rpt. New York: Arcadia House, 1950.
- Jack London, Jerry of the Islands. Serialized in Cosmopolitan Magazine (January-April, 1917). Book Publication: The Macmillan Co., April, 1917.
- 139 Labor, p. 162.
- 140 Charmian London, The Log of the Snark, p. 385. Writing to his publisher from Penduffryn on October 25, 1908, London stated, "I have now 20,000 words written

on a short Solomon Island novel--love-story and adventure. I am working on this novel now. . . ." "To George P. Brett," 25 October, 1908, Letters, p. 261.

141 Letter received from Earle Labor, 26 February 1979.

142 Charmian London, The Log of the Snark, p. 179.

143 Labor, p. 69.

144 Adventure, pp. 1, 3, 5, 6.

145 Adventure, p. 14.

146 Adventure, p. 15.

147 Adventure, pp. 21-22.

148 Adventure, p. 97.

149 Adventure, p. 98.

150 Adventure, pp. 105-106. In support of the assertion that these ideas are the author's own, note that Lackland's comments are a paraphrase of London's characterization of the Anglo-Saxon found in "These Bones Shall Rise Again" (1901): "The Anglo-Saxon is a pirate, a land robber and a sea robber. Underneath his thin coating of culture, he is what he was in Morgan's time, in Drake's time, in William's time, in Alfred's time." Revolution and Other Essays, p. 225.

151 Adventure, pp. 113-114.

152 Adventure, p. 146.

153 McClintock, p. 133.

CHAPTER IV

THE QUEST THAT FAILED:

LONDON'S LAST TALES OF THE SOUTH SEAS

"As I see him the utterly infinitesimal individual weaves among the mysteries a floss-like and wholly meaningless course--if course it be. In short I catch no meaning from all I have seen, and pass quite as I came, confused and dismayed."

--Theodore Dreiser

"We . . . float like fog-wisps through glooms and darkneses and light-flashings. It is all fog and mist, and we are all foggy and misty in the thick of the mystery."

--Jack London

"A thankless task God has appointed for men to be busied about."

--Ecclesiastes

The Jack London who stepped off the steamship Matsonia onto Hawaiian soil March 2, 1915, bore little resemblance to that healthy, handsome, confident author-celebrity who had sailed the Snark into Pearl Harbor some eight years before. Although he was only thirty-nine years old, he was overweight, insomniac, rheumatic, alternately lethargic and irritable and, most significantly, suffering from uremia (probably caused by the arsenic compounds that he had first used to treat his yaws on

the Snark cruise and had subsequently employed to treat a hypochondriacal case of tertiary syphilis).¹

Physically, psychologically, and artistically he was in rapid decline. He was a very sick man who turned with increasing frequency to drugs to relieve pain and to bring the relief of sleep. Today, should one visit the Jack London Museum near Glen Ellen, California, he may view London's medicine chest, the constant companion of his last years. Within it are to be found strychnine, strontium sulphate, aconite, belladonna, heroin, morphine, and opium. According to his latest biographer, by 1915 he "was ordering six times the normal prescription of opium, hyoscyamine, and camphor capsules," while "also taking regular injections of atropine and belladonna mixed with opium and morphine to stimulate his heart and bladder muscles and to put him to sleep. In other words, he was taking the fatal 'uppers and downers' of modern pill-pushers in an age that regulated the sale of drugs extremely inefficiently."² Although in this condition, he maintained his career-long writing regimen-- a thousand words a day.³ He could not slack off, for he continued to pour money into his Sonoma ranch faster than he could earn it and to entertain visitors on a lavish scale. However, his close friends noticed that his mercurial temperament was now verging on paranoia.

He was "domineering, ungracious, and rude," and "he was unable to see, or perhaps unwilling to admit, that it was the unpleasant effect of his malady that was driving his friends away. He began to feel sorry for himself, to lament the perfidy of friends and relatives and, the same time, to become even more furiously angry and abusive with anyone who did not agree with him."⁴ For example, when, in 1916, Spiro Ophens, a young Greek admirer of London, questioned the author's characterization of Mediterraneans in The Mutiny of the Elsinore, London accused him of treacherously turning upon the host who had opened his home to him: "At the end of it all, you have behaved toward me as any alleged modern Greek peddler has behaved toward the superior races."⁵

In such black moods of anger and disgust, he could write in the following fashion to his daughter Joan, who had "failed" him by siding with her mother, London's first wife, against him:

All my life I have been overcome by disgust, which has led me to turn pages down, and those pages have been turned down forever. It is my weakness as I have said before. Unless I should accidentally meet you on the street, I doubt if I should ever see you again. If you should be dying, and should ask for me at your bedside, I should surely come; on the other hand, if I were dying I should not care to have you at my bedside. A ruined colt is a ruined colt, and I do not like ruined colts.⁶

The expression of these thoughts to a twelve-year-old child reveals London's loss of stability.

Throughout his life Jack London had sought to escape from difficult situations: his youthful adventures as an oyster pirate, his voyage on the Sophia Sutherland, his tramp across America with Coxey's Army, the Klondike gold rush, his divorce from Eessie Maddern, the Snark cruise, and his retreat to the land (to his "Beauty Ranch") were all of a pattern. When problems became too great, when unpleasant decisions were in the offing, literally or figuratively, he would "light out for the territory." Now, in the last years of his life, his situation was once again intolerable. His body was failing him; popular and financial success had brought no satisfaction, for, as he had recognized early in his career, "the ephemeral flourishes and the great stories remain unwritten";⁷ he felt frustrated and isolated; and neither his socialism nor his determinism offered him solace or direction. But now he found most of his escape routes closed. Alcohol and drugs offered temporary respites and writing was also a partial refuge; for as he implied to his editor, his exhausting writing schedule was required both to meet his debts and to keep the ultimate escape of death, "the Noseless One," away. In fine, Jack London was at the end of his tether and "was

striving to discover where he had gone wrong, why success had meant failure in that it had not brought him happiness and content, what, if anything, he could find to persuade himself to stop short of the brink to which he had now come so close."⁸

This then was London's physical and psychological condition when he returned to Hawaii, hoping to recapture the health, pleasures, and inspiration which had been his during the four-and-a-half month visit there in 1907. In this context, the parallels between Jack London and Harry, the hero of Ernest Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," are striking. Both men, looking back over their lives and questioning their values and bearings, try to recapture the past by returning to the "good place" where they had lived and written well. London, like Harry, hopes to "work the fat off his soul," but ultimately comes to discover that time has run out. London's "Noseless One," Harry's hyena with the stinking breath, is the victor, and the "answers" remain as distant as Kilimanjaro's House of God or the high plateau of Guadalcanal where the Red One resides.

Miraculously, however, he was able to reverse briefly that creative decline which had closely paralleled the physical degeneration of his last years. The climate and relaxed atmosphere of the Islands were contributing

factors, yet of more significance was his return to the "books" in search of explanations. Darwin, Spencer, and Marx had been his guides when he had sought escape "from his dread of the Social Pit";⁹ now, as he realized that materialism offered the individual scant aid in comprehending the meaning of his own life and death, he turned not toward traditional religion, but to the psychoanalytical works of Freud, Prince, and especially Jung.¹⁰ Groping for something beyond a pessimistic materialism, he still felt it essential to find an empirical base for his beliefs. Or as James I. McClintock has characterized this stage of London's pilgrimage: "He was once again captivated by theoreticians who prof-fered him a scientifically defensible rationale for sub-scribing to humanly sustaining values as he flirted dangerously with nihilism."¹¹

To be found in the Jack London Collection of the Huntington Library is the author's copy of the 1916 English translation of C. G. Jung's Psychology of the Unconscious,¹² well worn and with numerous passages marked. In her biography of her husband, Charmian London recalls the extraordinary effect that this new knowledge had upon him, as he saw in it an escape from the frustrations and bitter depressions that had marred his immediately preceding years. "Mate Woman," he exclaimed, "I tell

you I am standing on the edge of a world so new, so terrible, so wonderful, that I am almost afraid to look over into it."¹³

The consequences of the discovery of depth psychology for London appear to have been threefold: First, it offered, in his opinion, the only "scientific" support for the concept of free will--a possibility which, up until this time, he had viewed as anathema to the rational mind. As evidence of this shift in the author's thinking, one must turn again to Charmian London's work, in which she quotes a lengthy passage from Beatrice Hinkle's introduction to Psychology of the Unconscious and then comments on London's response to it:

"The value of self-consciousness lies in the fact that man is enabled to reflect upon himself and learn to understand the true origin and significance of his actions and opinions, that he may adequately value the real level of his development and avoid being self-deceived and therefore inhibited from finding his biological adaptation. He need no longer be unconscious of the motives underlying his actions or hide himself behind a changed exterior, in other words, be merely a series of reactions to stimuli, as the mechanists have it, but he may to a certain extent become a self-creating and self-determining being."

I shall never cease to remember the day when, all a tip-toe with discovery, Jack entered the dining room, slipped into his chair and repeated the foregoing italicized sentence. I, knowing his theretofore immovable position regarding free will, sat aghast at the implication upon his tongue. At length:

"Do you realize what you are saying? What you are implying?"

"I know how you feel--how surprised you are," he answered. "But it almost would seem that I can grasp, from this, some sort of inkling of free will."¹⁴

A few days later he was to shock her again with the comment: "For the first time in my life, . . . I see the real value to the human soul of the confessional."¹⁵

The second point of Jung's appeal for Jack London logically flows from the questionings aroused by contemplation of free will, guilt and responsibility. In the subsequent analysis of key stories written in the Hawaiian summer of the writer's last year is to be found a recurring issue: the possibility of a reality beyond materialistic determinism--a spiritual dimension hinted at through the pervasiveness of religious mythology, tradition, and folklore.

Finally, it was this significance of dreams and myth in the Jungian world view that opened for London a new field of exploration--his own dreams and those of whole cultures as expressed in their myths. "It may come as a surprise," writes Earle Labor, "that, several years before Eliot immortalized Miss Jessie L. Weston by poeticizing the cruelties of April, the Wonder Boy of the Naturalist Carnival had already discovered a similar key--perhaps the skeleton key--to the 'lostness' of modern

man in the primitive folklore of Polynesia--and in the writings of Carl Jung."¹⁶

Jack London left Hawaii for the mainland in the late summer of 1915, but returned to Honolulu that December, remaining until July 26, 1916. He died November 22 of the same year. But during this last Hawaiian sojourn he played the role of writer-celebrity, "Papa London," whenever his health permitted. Dinner and card parties were frequent and he entertained by reading aloud "in the stately numbers of Ecclesiastes,"¹⁷ an ominously meaningful selection when viewed in retrospect. At such times, his friends would ask Charmian, "What ails Jack? He looks well enough, but there's something about him . . . his eyes. . . ."¹⁸

In the morning hours of these days most of the short stories later to be collected in On the Makaloa Mat (1919) and The Red One (1918) were written. These tales, in which the conflicts and questionings inspired by the author's physical dissolution and the perceptions of Jung were given artistic form, are among Jack London's finest achievements. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to an analysis of five key stories in these collections.

The introductory and title story¹⁹ of On the Makaloa Mat, which was completed at Waikiki, Hawaii, June 6, 1916, differs from the characteristic stories

in this collection in that it is not overtly indebted to Jungian psychology; however, in its tribute to Hawaiian traditions, spontaneity, and ingenuousness, as contrasted with the haole's (white man's) practicality, reticence, and commercialism, this tale is both a thematic extension of "The House of Pride" and a prefatory statement of a dominant concern in On the Makaloa Mat which is reflective of Jungian thought--the needed retention of cultural traditions and an openness to life to give meaning to, or to impose order upon, the chaos of existence.

In construction "On the Makaloa Mat" is a representative London frame story, which opens in an idyllic setting. Under a hau tree near her Waikiki beach house (one of her six homes) sits sixty-four-year-old Martha Scandwell, a one-quarter Hawaiian descendent of "the royal stocks . . . whose genealogies were chanted in meles a thousand years before written speech was acquired."²⁰ Her husband, Roscoe Scandwell, a descendent of New England puritans, is one of the financial movers of the Islands. Yet he is not cast in the mold of Percival Ford, for he has been "well taught of Hawaiian love and love ways."²¹ Together they represent, for the author, a saving synthesis of the best attributes of the brown and white races: humaneness, gaiety, culture, breeding probity, business acumen, and practicality.

As Martha watches her grandchildren frolic under the tropical sun, she is joined by her older sister, Bella, recently returned from a visit to California. Pleasantries are exchanged. Then a passing comment ("All our husbands have done well by us with what we brought them."²²) opens what had heretofore been a closed door: Bell's brief marriage, almost fifty years before, to the haole George Castner. Although George had died, leaving Bella childless, when she was only twenty-two, she had never remarried.

Now begins the inside narrative as Bella reveals the unhappy details of that marriage arranged for her by an uncle with utilitarian foresight:

'George Castner is a coming man. I have chosen well for you. . . . Not always will Hawaiians rule in Hawaii. Just as they let their wealth slip out of their hands, so will their rule slip out of their hands. Political power and the land always go together. There will be great changes, revolutions no one knows how many nor of what sort, save that in the end the haole will possess the land and the rule. . . . It is written in the books. It is ever so where the haole conflicts with the easier races. I, your Uncle Robert, who am half Hawaiian and half haole, know whereof I speak.'²³

Uncle Robert was right. George Castner was "a coming man." A scrupulously honest puritan, he worked the ranch of an absentee landlord for a salary of

eighteen hundred dollars a year, of which he managed to save sixteen hundred dollars, while the beautiful Bella, raised in the royal Hawaiian tradition of abundance (" . . . a bullock killed for every meal, fresh fish by runners from the ponds of Saipio and Kiholo, and the best and rarest at all times of everything. . . ." ²⁴), cooked, baked, scrubbed, and mended for this miser to whom displays of affection were alien.

To her sister's question of physical abuse, Bella makes this revealing reply:

"No! No! George Castner was never a brute, a beast. Almost have I wished, often, that he had been. He never laid hand on me. . . . He never raised his voice to me. Never--oh, can you believe it?--do, please, sister, believe it--did we have a high word nor a cross word. But that house of his, of ours, at Nahala, was gray. All the color of it was gray and cool and chill while I was bright with all colors of sun and earth and blood and birth. It was very cold, gray cold, with that cold gray husband of mine at Nahala.--You know he was gray, Martha. Gray like those portraits of Emerson we used to see at school. His skin was gray. Sun and weather and all hours in the saddle could never tan it. And he was as gray inside as out." ²⁵

Yet her good, gray husband does lay the groundwork for a financial empire. With Bella's five-thousand-dollar dowry and the money that he was able to save, George bought the upper Nahala lands with their vast water reserves--"each purchase a hard-driven bargain, his face

the very face of poverty. Today the Nahala Ditch alone pays me forty thousand a year," relates Bella. "But was it worth it? . . . If only once, madly, he had crushed me in his arms" or "lingered with me five minutes from . . . his fidelity to his employers! Sometimes I could have . . . smashed the sewing machine upon the floor and danced a hula on it, just to make him burst out and lose his temper and be human, be a brute, be a man . . . instead of a gray, frozen demi-god."²⁶

During the first year of their marriage, Bella endured, then, curiously, began to accept George. "For he was good. He was just."²⁷ However, fate intervened when he was called to Honolulu on business and, to save money, he sent Bella to visit her relatives at Kilohana, the family home. While there enjoying the opulence and easy life she had almost forgotten, Bella met and was invited to join Prince Lili'ilo, heir to the Hawaiian throne, and his party on a royal progress around the Big Island. She accepted the invitation and borrowed the most high-spirited stallion in her uncle's stable as her mount.

As noted, there is no manifest debt to modern psychology in this story, but the choice of detail and emphasis placed by the author (through the persona of Bella) on the stallion "Hilo" have suppressed sexual

connotations and are used by London to convey obliquely Bella's desire for freedom and sexual release. Observe, for example, Bella's descriptions of the physical attractiveness of Hilo:

"I was the first woman on his back. He was a three-year-old, almost a four-year, and just broken. So black and in such vigor of coat that the high lights on him clad him in shimmering silver. He was the biggest riding animal on the ranch . . . and roped wild only weeks before. I have never seen so beautiful a horse. He had the round, deep-chested, big-hearted, well-coupled body of the ideal . . . and his head and neck were true thoroughbred, slender, yet full, and with lovely alert ears. . . . And his legs and feet were lovely, too, unblemished, sure and firm. . . ."28

Life on the back of Hilo is in obvious contrast to the gray world of Nahala:

"Oh, when he ran with me up the long-grass slopes, and down the long-grass slopes, it was like hurdling in a dream, for he cleared the grass at every bound, leaping like a deer, a rabbit, or a fox terrier. . . . And he had, not a wicked eye, but, oh, such a roguish eye, intelligent and looking as if it cherished a joke. . . . And I asked Uncle John for Hilo. And Uncle John looked at me . . . and though he did not say it, I knew he was feeling 'Dear Bella'. . . ."29

Note also the similarities between the above descriptions of the horse and that of her soon-to-be lover Prince Lilolilo:

"He filled the eyes of any woman, yes, and of any man. Twenty-five he was, in all glorious ripeness of man, great and princely in body as he was great and princely in spirit. No matter how wild the fun, how reckless mad the sport, he never seemed to forget that he was royal and that all his forbears had been high chief chiefs. . . . He was gracious, sweet, kindly, comradely . . . and severe, and stern, and harsh, if he were crossed too grievously. . . . He was all man, man, man, and he was all prince, with a strain of the merry boy in him, and the iron in him that would have made him a good and strong king of Hawaii had he come to the throne. . . . Oh, how I see him!--his head thrown back a little, with that high, bright, imperious, and utterly carefree poise that was so usual of him."³⁰

In the course of the royal progress Bella and the prince became lovers, who for two weeks shared the Makaloa (royal) Mat. And it is with an affection for detail that London, again through the character of Bella, catalogues the traditions and rituals of the royal Hawaiian lovers, who freely acted out roles in a timeless drama. However, after a "lifetime of living compressed into two short weeks,"³¹ Bella accepted the inevitable. With the single word pau (finished), Lilolilo bid her good-bye. She returned to George; but having experienced fullness of life and love, returning was "like entering into the machinery of a clock and becoming one of the cogs or wheels, inevitably and remorselessly turning around and around, so I entered back into the gray life of Nahala."³²

For two more years, Bella, like a "dead woman,"³³ cooked and sewed until George, refusing to buy the warm clothing required, succumbed to the winter storms of the Hawaiian uplands. Within a month Prince Lilolilo was also dead, and Bella never remarried, keeping, instead, Lilolilo's altar of the dead within her heart. Her final comment is "You are the first, Sister Martha, whom I have permitted to enter that room."³⁴

On one level this narrative is an unhappy love story, but it is also a tribute to a dying culture and its appealing life style which were inexorably being replaced by the hard practicality and commercialism of the white man. (And in his sympathy for the Polynesian, Jack London cannot resist the irony of killing off George Castner, "the coming man," before he can see the fruition of his plans.)

Stylistically, the spare, hard prose of London's earlier tales of violence, which is a precursor of the Hemingway style, is replaced in "On the Makaloa Mat" by an easy, almost prolix, phrasing which is both intentional and effective in creating the lush ambience of a bygone era.

Also of note is the author's use of counterpoint for the same thematic purpose. While examples of this technique are numerous, the most significant are the

contrast between the abundance and sumptuousness of the Waikiki world of the outside narrative and the gray blandness of the Nahala landscape of the inside narrative; the contrast between Bella's life style as George's wife and her rightful position, typified by the obeisance paid her by "an ancient crone" who chanted a mele of the ancestry and lonied (massaged) her legs as she (Bella) narrated her story; the contrast between George Castner's niggardliness and implied sexual impuissance and Prince Lilolilo's largesse and healthy masculinity; the use of weather and landscape to dramatize Bella's psychological condition, expressly in the natural beauties of the two-week progress seen in contrast with the raging storm through which Bella rides after bidding the Prince farewell and the gray world to which she returns; and, finally, the descriptive parallels between stallion and prince used by London to convey the sublimated passions of Bella.

"On the Makaloa Mat," one of Jack London's better stories, effectively introduces a dominant theme of these final stories--the struggle between a life sustaining historical and cultural tradition and the rapacious acquisitiveness of "those who sought the thing, not the spirit, who kept records in ledgers rather than numbered heartbeats breast to breast, who added columns

of figures rather than remembered embraces and endearments of look and speech and touch."³⁵

Jack London completed "The Water Baby"³⁶ on October 2, 1916, after returning to Glen Ellen, California. Like "The Bones of Kahekili" and "Shin Bones," the other stories from On the Makaloa Mat to be discussed in this chapter, "The Water Baby" utilizes the frame story technique to convey a simple central narrative devoid of the explicit detailing of violence and suffering which is both a strength and a weakness of much of the writer's earlier fiction.

The narrator of the frame story is John Lakana (Hawaiian for "London"), a cynical modern haole, who lends "a weary ear"³⁷ to the chanting of his fishing partner, the aged Polynesian, Kohokumu. Lakana, much younger than Kohokumu, is, nonetheless, unable to match the energy and joie de vivre of the old man. He cites physical causes--an aching head and an upset stomach--but the reader recognizes another source of his obscure malaise; the enervating ennui of a purposeless existence.

In contrast, Kohokumu is a believer in the old pagan religion and a man who feels that he is part of a natural process in a meaningful universe. When the reader first meets him, he is "chanting of the deeds and

adventures of Maui, the Promethean demigod of Polynesia who fished up dry land from ocean depths with hooks made fast to heaven, who lifted up the sky where under previously men had gone on all fours, not having space to stand erect, and who made the sun . . . stand still and agree . . . to traverse the sky more slowly. . . ."38

After listening to Kohokumu with apparent irritation, Lakana demands: "And you believe all this?"39 In response the old man appeals to tradition: "all our old men from all the way back tell us these things as I . . . tell them to my sons and grandsons. . . ."40 Then he startles the narrator with a perceptive comparison: "I have read the Hawaiian bible . . . and there have I read that your Big Man of the Beginning made the earth and sky . . . and all animals . . . in six days. Why Maui didn't do anything like that much. He didn't make anything. He just put things in order . . . and it took him a long, long time. . . ."41 Taken aback by this fair reply, the author's surrogate muses to himself that science and evolutionary theory support the Hawaiian myth of creation by asserting that man first moved on all fours, the earth's revolution on its axis is slowing down, thereby lengthening the day, and the Hawaiian Islands were raised from the sea.

Disturbed by this trend in "the profitless discussion,"42 Lakana is relieved to find a diversion--

the fish begin to bite. Ironically, however, this distraction only serves to reinforce the contrast between the two men. In amazement the narrator watches the Hawaiian, "past seventy . . . , lean as a spear, and shriveled like a mummy" do "what few young athletes of" Lakana's "race would do or could do."⁴³ Kohokumu dives into the forty-foot depths of the coral reef, pries a nine-foot octopus from its lair, and kills it by biting "into the heart and life of the matter."⁴⁴ Rising to the surface with his conquest, "the grisly clinging thing," the Polynesian bursts "into the pule of triumph which had been chanted by countless squid-catching generations before him. . . ."⁴⁵ Looking on from the outrigger, the white man is simultaneously fascinated and repelled.

It is difficult to miss the symbolic import of this scene. In his totality of beliefs and physical abilities, old Kohokumu is a part of the natural world in which he functions. He is not like John Lakana, a skeptical spectator, but rather a participant in his world, one who bites "into the heart and life of the matter," experiences it to the full, and finds it good. Significantly, what for the haole is a monster, snake-like and horrifying, is for the Hawaiian "a very fine squid,"⁴⁶ a God-given delicacy.

When the narrator questions Kohokumu's remarkable stamina and longevity, the old man responds in a passage whose mythic content is indicative of London's reading of Jung:

"The Sea is my mother. I was born in a double canoe, during a Kona gale. . . . From her, the Sea, my mother, I received my strength. Whenever I return to her arms . . . , as I have returned this day, I grow strong again and immediately. She, to me, is the milk giver, the life source. . . ."

"Some day," old Kohokumu rambled on, "when I am really old, I shall be reported of men as drowned in the sea. This will be an idle thought of men. In truth, I shall have returned into the arms of my mother, there to rest under the heart of her breast until the second birth of me, when I shall emerge into the sun a flashing youth of splendor, like Maui himself when he was golden young."⁴⁷

To Lakana's deprecating comment that this is a "queer" religion, the Polynesian replies that with age he has learned one thing--truth is to be found within oneself. It arises from the "deeps" and man, "if he be not blind," acknowledges it.⁴⁸ Such an epistemology obviously runs contrary to the empiricism that London, the avowed materialist, always espoused (at least publicly). His dramatization of this concept through the sympathetic figure of Kohokumu suggests that in his last year Jack London was seriously questioning his philosophical positions.

Although John Lakana challenges the old Hawaiian's beliefs with the nihilism of Mark Twain's mysterious stranger, suggesting that all might be a dream, Kohokumu is unperturbed: "There is much more in dreams than we know. . . . Dreams go deep, all the way down, maybe to before the beginning."⁴⁹ Jung's theory that dreams are keys to the understanding of personality and that myths (the dreams of peoples arising from their "collective unconscious"⁵⁰) are the keys to the comprehension of racial and cultural values is reflected in this quotation.⁵¹

"The Water Baby" concludes with the inside narrative related by Kohokumu at John Lakana's request. The tale of Keikiwai, the Water Baby, is a reaffirmation of the theme conveyed in the old man's confrontation with the octopus. To supply lobsters for the king, the young boy must dive to the bottom of a shark-infested lagoon. However, the Water Baby, "a kind of underwater Mowgli,"⁵¹ has one distinct advantage; he is such a part of the natural world that he understands and speaks the language of fishes. Like a modern con artist, he misleads the sharks, causing them to destroy each other, while he safely gathers the king's supper. Again the point is made. The unstudied, spontaneous, natural Polynesian triumphs in his environment.

When Kohokumu concludes his story, he silences Lakana with "I know what next you would say. You would say with my own eyes I did not see this. . . . But I do know, and I can prove it. My father's father knew the grandson of the Water Baby's father's uncle."⁵²

The contrast between an ingenuous but life-sustaining faith and a stultifying, debilitating skepticism is clear. Jack London is poised between them, sympathetic to the former, intellectually committed to the latter.

Any discussion of Jungian influence in "The Water Baby" (as well as the subsequent stories in this chapter) must acknowledge the primacy of James I. McClintock in this field. His essay "Jack London's Use of Carl Jung's Psychology of the Unconscious,"⁵⁴ reprinted in revised form in his book White Logic: Jack London's Short Stories,⁵⁵ is recognized as a definitive study. Although McClintock is generally critical of London's short stories written after 1905, he has high praise for the On the Makaloa Mat collection, considering it superior to the author's earlier South Sea fiction, particularly those Hawaiian stories contained in The House of Pride. He believes, with justification, that this last creative outburst testifies "to the restorative influence the psychologist's [Jung's] thought had upon the quality of London's fiction."⁵⁶ The critic has special praise

for the unity and simplicity of these tales and for London's return to his "most productive themes and subjects: death, the conflict between primitive and modern cultures, and the struggle between optimism and pessimism."⁵⁷ As a cursory reading indicates, these motifs all function in "The Water Baby."

Regarding London's debt to specific aspects of Jungian psychology, McClintock emphasizes the concepts of logical "directed thinking" and its obverse "dream or phantasy thinking,"⁵⁸ which are discussed in "Chapter I: Concerning Two Kinds of Thinking" of Psychology of the Unconscious and dramatized by London in the Lakana-Kohokumu contrast. Also the critic notes the fictionist's utilization of Jung's "libido" theory, whose definition (by Dr. Hinkle) London underlined in his copy of Psychology of the Unconscious:

He [Jung] saw in the term libido a concept of unknown nature, comparable with Bergson's élan vital, a hypothetical energy of life, which occupies itself not only in sexuality but in various physiological and psychological manifestations . . . and all the human activities and interests. This cosmic energy or urge manifested in the human being he calls libido and compares it with the energy of physics.⁵⁹

According to McClintock, London interprets this "energy of life" as the nuclear force motivating his questing heroes of earlier tales and the source of old Kohokumu's

vitality. It is a well-spring of optimism in opposition to the grim deterministic truths of science that debilitate such later figures as John Lakana.

"The Water Baby," when interpreted from this perspective, reads as an artistically effective presentation of the previously cited "tension between civilized skepticism" and that "natural affirmation" based on "the most common . . . archetype . . . that of the sun (the hero and libido energy) setting (dying) in the sea (the womb) and rising in the morning (being reborn)."⁶⁰

While McClintock's analysis reveals the extent to which Jack London gave fictive shape to Jung's theories, the important fact which his research substantiates is that at the end of his career the author turned, as he had so often before, to the new sciences (in this case, psychoanalysis) in hopes of discovering truths which would alleviate that "sense of the futility of life"⁶¹ which haunted him. However, "The Bones of Kahekili" and "Shin Bones" portray more unequivocally than does "The Water Baby" the inability of London's modern man to transcend the limitations of pessimistic materialism, strongly suggesting that their creator's final quest ended in failure.

In "The Bones of Kahekili,"⁶² completed at Waikiki, Honolulu, June 28, 1916, the author's persona is Hardman

Pool, "a source of life, a source of food, a fount of wisdom, a giver of law, a smiling beneficence, a blackness of thunder and punishment . . ." ⁶³ to those who live and work on his vast Hawaiian ranch. Little psychological insight is required to recognize that Pool is London's idealized vision of himself, a patriarch on his California ranch, ⁶⁴ in possession of

all the natural attributes of chiefship: the gigantic stature, the fearlessness, the pride, and the high hot temper that could brook no impudence nor insult, that could be neither bullied nor awed by any utmost magnificence of power that walked on two legs, and that could compel service of lesser humans, not through any ignoble purchase by bargaining but through an unspoken **but** expected condescending **of largesse**. ⁶⁵

The seventy-one-year Pool, like Roscoe Scandwell in "On the Makaloa Mat," is a haole who has gained much from Hawaii. He has married into Polynesian royalty, thereby coming into possession of land, wealth, and a deep understanding of native traditions: "He knew his Hawaiians from the outside and the in, knew them better than themselves--their Polynesian circumlocutions, faiths, customs, and mysteries." ⁶⁶ Ironically, however, this "fount of wisdom" is, like London his creator, a skeptic, a questioner of meaning and purpose in life who must turn to alcohol to escape thought. Gaining much that is

Hawaiian, he has, nonetheless, failed to achieve that inner peace, that affirmative vision, that is the Polynesian's most envied possession.

The John Lakana-Kohokumu contrast of "The Water Baby" is echoed in "The Bones of Kahekili" as Hardman Pool has his antithesis in Kumuhana, a seventy-nine-year-old Hawaiian survivor of the old days when pagan rituals of human sacrifice were practiced in the Islands. This tale's inside narrative is related by Kumuhana in response to Pool's demand that he be told where lie the bones of Kahekili, an ancestral alii (high chief), from whose line Pool's wife has descended. After considerable hesitation, the old Hawaiian tells how, fifty-one years before (1829), he had been taken as a moepuu, a human sacrifice, "to go the way of Kahekili and his bones and to care for him afterward and forever, in the shadowy other world."⁶⁶

He relates how after a night of drunken revelry he awoke to find the high priest Eoppo and numerous chiefs standing above him. The other kanakas had heard of Kahekili's death and fled, leaving Kumuhana as the only candidate for sacrifice, although tradition required two escorts for an alii into the nether world. Kahekili, in a haole coffin, and Kumuhana, with a fearful hangover,

were taken to the middle of the Molokai channel as the high priest intoned a Maori death chant:

"But death is nothing new.
Death is and has been ever since old Maui died.
Then Pata-tai laughed loud
And woke the goblin god,
Who severed him in two, and shut him in,
So dusk of eve came on."⁶⁸

At the appointed site, the chiefs slipped Kahekili, in his coffin, into the sea; however, the high priest opposed the sacrificing of Kumuhana, arguing that half the required tribute was insulting to the dead alii. At that point, a cry of horror ended the debate:

"The coffin, head end up, had not sunk. . . . And the glass of it was to us, so that we could see the face and head of Kahekili through the glass; and he grinned at us . . . and seemed alive already in the other world and angry with us, and, with other-world power, about to wreak his anger upon us. Up and down he bobbed, and the canoe drifted closer upon him.
'Kill him!' 'Bleed him!' 'Thrust to the heart of him!' These things the chiefs were crying out to Eoppo in their fear."⁶⁹

As the knife was raised to strike, a chief, fending off the coffin, broke the face plate and sent Kahekili's bones to their resting place among the coral reefs of the Molokai Channel.⁷⁰ Consequently, Kumuhana was spared. "And I, who was a moepuu," he concludes, "became a man once more. And I lived, though I died a thousand deaths

from thirst before we gained back to the beach at Waikiki."⁷¹

As Kumuhana ends his narrative, the white man remains in silent meditation, fascinated by the last line of the Maori death chant, "'So dusk of eve came on,' finding in it an intense satisfaction of beauty . . ."⁷² but no promise of salvation. In this instance, the Polynesian mythology offers no assurance. "We are wise," says Hardman Pool, "but the wisdom is bitter."⁷³

According to Howard Lachtman, the core meaning of this short story is found in

the implied comparison between old Kumuhana's two masters [which] suggests that this ancient Hawaiian will survive both the great lord who required his life and the lesser one who demanded his secret. Whatever knowledge Hardman Pool has gained about the facts of Kaheliki's bones is less important than the intimation of Kumuhana's own vitality of spirit. But it is this last knowledge which Pool, the materialistic patriarch of modern Hawaiian civilization, cannot comprehend.⁷⁴

Such an optimistic interpretation of this story is not, in this reader's opinion, justified. Kumuhana's survival is a matter of luck and his tale is littered with images of frustrated passion, pain, and death. It contains no affirmation. Instead, James McClintock is closer to the truth when he comments that in "The Bones of Kaheliki" the "riddle of death and rebirth" is solved by a

recognition of "the finality of death. . . . Maui the sun god of rebirth is dead. . . . The destructive 'goblin god' rules. . . ."75 Mankind can only face mortality with stoic acceptance. Too intellectually honest to write himself into a saving belief, the author was dramatizing the failure of Jungian insights to bring the looked-for answers.

Only one more story from On the Makaloa Mat need be cited in support of this thesis. In "Shin Bones,"76 completed at Waikiki, July 16, 1916, Jack London, once more, effectively fictionalized his fruitless struggle to escape the trap of pessimistic materialism.

The parallel between "Shin Bones," and "The Water Eaby," and "The Bones of Kahekili" is significant. Again, London has constructed a frame story in which the skepticism of the modern world confronts the ancient traditions and religious beliefs of Polynesia. Yet "Shin Bones" differs from these tales in that herein the confrontation is not between a cynical white man and an aged Hawaiian; instead, the modern skeptic is Prince Akuli,⁷⁷ an Oxford-educated sophisticate, descended from "the oldest and highest aliis of Hawaii."⁷⁸

The setting of the outside narrative is a mountain bower on the mythical island of Lakanaii (London), "conceded by all to be the wildest, the most wildly

beautiful, and . . . the richest of all the islands."⁷⁹
 Prince Akuli and an unnamed narrator are awaiting repair
 of the Prince's limousine.

In the opening pages of exposition the narrator
 relates the Prince's heritage, which is chanted in
 "interminable genealogies," all the way back to "Wakea,
 who is their Adam, and Papa, their Eve."⁸⁰ Then he
 abstracts his introductory material in a passage which
 sets up the inside narrative and introduces the thematic
 conflict between modern skepticism and traditional beliefs:

And so, out of all incests and lusts of the
 primitive cultures and beast man's gropings
 toward the stature of manhood, out of all red
 murders and brute battlings and matings with
 the younger brothers of the demigods, world-
 polished, Oxford-accented, twentieth century
 to the tick of the second, comes Prince Akuli
 . . . , pure-veined Polynesian, a living
 bridge across the centuries, comrade, friend
 and fellow traveler, out of his wrecked
 seven-thousand-dollar limousine, marooned with
 me in a begonia paradise fourteen hundred feet
 above the sea . . . , to tell me of his mother
 who reverted in her old age to ancientness of
 religious concept and ancestor worship and
 collected and surrounded herself with the
 charnel bones of those who had been her fore-
 runners back in the darkness of time.⁸¹

The tale which the Prince relates is an initiation
 story⁸² rooted in the veneration of these ancestral
 remains. What Akuli characterizes as a "collecting fad"⁸³
 was assiduously practiced by both his parents--but for

opposite reasons. Hiwilani, his mother, revered the bones of her progenitors as an integral part of the old faith of pre-Christian Hawaii. ("It gave me the creeps, when I was a boy," says the Prince, "to go into that big, forever-twilight room of hers, and know that . . . in all the jars were the preserved bone remnants of the shadowy dust of the ancestors whose seed had come down and been incorporated in the living, breathing me."⁸⁴) Diametrically opposed to Hiwilani's belief was the attitude of Prince Kanau, Akuli's father, "modern to his finger tips."⁸⁵ He was a businessman, cynic, and materialist who "believed neither in the gods of the kahunas (priests) nor of the missionaries."⁸⁶ His commitment was to the world of sugar stocks and horse breeding and to music, "which is stronger than drink and quicker than opium."⁸⁷ Nonetheless, he too collected bones, but only as a philatelist collects stamps.

The inside narrative related by Prince Akuli is the story of his journey with Ahuna, an aged family retainer and adherent of the old religion, to the secret Cave of the Dead to obtain certain ancestral bones demanded by Hiwilani for her collection. This expedition, taken when Akuli was a teen-ager, was the result of Hiwilani's incessant cajoling, badgering and threatening of Ahuna to reveal the ancient burial site, for he alone knew

the location of the cave. When Ahuna acquiesced to Hiwilani's demand by agreeing to make the difficult journey and to return with her mother's and her grandmother's bones, he stipulated that only Akuli, sworn to secrecy, should accompany him. However, the Prince was his father's son: "I refused to go on the bone-snatching expedition. I said I didn't care a whoop for the bones of all the aliis of my family and race.-- You see, I had just discovered Jules Verne. . . ." ⁸⁸ The future, not the past, held the youth's attention. "I stood with my father," declares the Prince, "when it came to modern skepticism, and I told her [Hiwilani] the whole thing was rubbish." ⁸⁹ Only when his mother bribed him with a promise of an Oxford education did Akuli consent to accompany Ahuna. Ironically, the Prince's journey into his past is his talisman into the future. The knowledge of science, the arts, and philosophy derived from his Western education would serve to sustain his youthful unbelief.

The journey began with the Prince, Ahuna, and eight aged paddlers setting out for the treacherous Iron-bound Coast, an area whose wild beauty was matched only by its danger. Without bays or anchorages along its shores, a mere landing at the base of its forboding mountains

was a test of courage and the trip inland was even more trying. The "great forbidding cliff walls . . . , their summits wreathed in cloud and rain squall," and the valleys, resembling fissures in "a lofty and madly vertical back country,"⁹⁰ contribute to the creation of an atmosphere of disorientation, danger and mystery required for the fifteen-year-old cynic's perilous journey back into the history of his race and his consequent spiritual detumescence.

In the last stage of their quest, Prince Akuli and Ahuna, his mentor, set out alone. This literal night journey, on a path that resembled "a Jacob's ladder to the sky,"⁹¹ ended at a tarn in a wasteland, "a God-forsaken place of naked, eroded lava, to which only rarely could the scant vegetation find foothold."⁹² The two dove into the pool, swam through an underwater passage and surfaced in a cave which they followed into the mountain's core. When the Prince swore never to reveal what he was about to see, Ahuna allowed him to enter the burial chamber. In this "centuries old family attic"⁹³ the youth confronted a thousand years of Hawaiian history. Among the accumulated treasures were the bones: ". . . they were all there the Hawaiian race from the beginning of Hawaiian time."⁹⁴

As the Prince moved among the remains of his ancestors, his initial attitude reflected the irreverence of youth and his father's cynicism, but his perceptions quickly changed. This experience, "in the culminating period of [his] adolescence,"⁹⁵ became an epiphany, when he viewed the pathetic physical remnants of the most famous love triangle of royal Polynesia and heard Ahuna relate their story.

Three hundred years earlier, the beautiful Laulani, the wife of Chief Akaiko, took Keola, a famed athlete, as her lover. When she fled with him, Akaiko pursued and, "in a forgotten battle on the sands of Kalini,"⁹⁶ slew Keola. Of all that passion and grief, there remained two bundles of bones (Laulani's and Akaiko's) and a spear-head made from Keola's shin bone.

As Ahuna ended his tale, the Prince "could but gaze, with imagination at the one time sobered and fired."⁹⁷ For

"here were the three, I thought--Arthur and Launcelot and Guinevere. This . . . was the end of it all, of life and strife and striving and love, the weary spirits of these long-gone ones to be evoked by fat old women and mangy sorcerers, the bones of them to be esteemed of collectors and betted on horse races and ace-fulls or to be sold for cash and invested in sugar stocks.

"For me it was illumination. I learned there in the burial cave the great lesson."⁹⁸

Recognizing for the first time "the blight man was born for," Akuli kept two of the bones as memento mori, and they served well, for as he tells the outside narrator, they changed his life and gave him "a modesty and a humility"⁹⁹ which his inherited wealth could not destroy.

Like Hardman Pool, Prince Akuli is wise, but the wisdom is bitter. In an epithet foreshadowing T. S. Eliot, London's protagonist tells his friend that there are no mysteries in life, for "this is the twentieth century and we stink of gasoline."¹⁰⁰ However, that revelation in the Cave of the Dead had given him his "religion or practice of living."¹⁰² Moderation, resignation and stoicism in the face of time and dissolution are his meagre substitutes for the customs, folklore and beliefs which gave meaning to old Ahuna's life. The predicament of the Prince, which Jack London saw as representative of modern man's, is summarized in an African proverb: "If a man does away with his traditional way of living and throws away his good customs, he had better first make certain that he has something of value to replace them." The Prince's replacement is the author's own. And as "Shin Bones" suggests, both author and his fictive surrogate perceived stoicism's inadequacy in any confrontation with the Medusa of atheism.

As this analysis and summary indicate, "Shin Bones" utilizes numerous archetypes identified by Jung--the perilous journey, the descent into water, the cave--all aspects of the story's initiation theme, in itself, a universal motif. Ironically, however, at the thematic heart of "Shin Bones" is modern man's alienation from that mythopoeic vision which, according to Jung, gives meaning and value to the individual life.¹⁰² Like his father, Prince Akuli cannot accept the Polynesian mythic tradition.

The noted London scholar Andrew Sinclair has seriously misread these last stories when he states that in them Jack London identifies himself "with aged Hawaiian natives telling the tales and myths of their past to skeptical foreigners."¹⁰³ While in all probability he wished to so identify himself, he could not. Kohokumu and John Lakana, Kumuhana and Hardman Pool, Ahuna and Prince Akuli personify the divergent visions struggling within the writer's psyche: the "comforting mythic . . . tradition and the corruptive materialism of modern civilization," one offering "to preserve man's spiritual vitality . . . the other diminish [ing] those who reap its benefits."¹⁰⁴ Yet in each story Jack London implicitly associates himself with the voices of skepticism and materialism. Lakana, Pool, and Akuli echo the author's

own questionings. The Jungian insights that Jack London had "found in Psychology of the Unconscious, like the systems he had found before, had failed on the eve of his own death to give him a sure faith."¹⁰⁵

"The Red One,"¹⁰⁶ completed at Waikiki, May 22, 1916, is an appropriate short story with which to conclude this study of London's South Sea fiction. Not only is it a quality narrative, deserving to rank with his finest achievements, but it is also a compendium of the major themes and motifs that inform the entire corpus of South Pacific narratives. Nonetheless, this story has been virtually ignored by London scholars. There have been a few articles of the "notes and queries" variety published, but the two standard works of London criticism, Earle Labor's Jack London and James I. McClintock's White Logic, do not discuss it.¹⁰⁷

"The Red One" differs from the other stories analyzed in this chapter in several significant aspects. First, the setting is no longer Hawaii, the Pacific Paradise, but rather its opposite, the black hell of Melanesia, specifically, Guadalcanal, the Solomon Islands. And, as in earlier stories, this brutal world elicits the worst in human nature. Graphic descriptions of violence, suffering, and death (which were muted in On the Makaloa Mat) once again convey the naturalist's law of life.¹⁰⁸

Also of note is the fact that London puts aside the frame story technique employed in "On the Makaloa Mat," "The Water Baby," "The Eones of Kahekili," and "Shin Bones"; instead, he shifts to a Jamesian third-person point of view. The narrative voice limits itself to the thought processes of the protagonist, and the action of the narrative is presented from his perspective. As shall be shown, the author's abandonment of his favored frame story technique and the utilization instead of this more sophisticated presentation are essential to the story's successful thematic development.

The aspects of "The Red One" cited above demonstrate its divergence from the other short stories discussed in this chapter. However, in its archetypal quest motif, obsession with death, and thematic contrast between primitive and modern cultures, "The Red One" manifests its kinship with the Polynesian tales of Jack London's last year.

"The Red One," the "most haunting of his final stories,"¹⁰⁹ is the tale of Bassett, a scientist, and his search for the source of an unearthly sound emanating from the unexplored interior of Guadalcanal. While butterfly collecting on the beach at Ringmanu, he first heard its call, which he subsequently described as

that enormous peal that dominated the land far into the strongholds of the surrounding tribes. The mountain gorge which was its source rang to the rising of it until it brimmed over and flooded earth and sky and air. With the wantonness of a sick man's fancy, he likened it to the mighty cry of some Titan of the Elder World vexed with misery or wrath. Higher and higher it arose, challenging and demanding in such profoundness of volume that it seemed intended for ears beyond the narrow confines of the solar system. There was in it, too, the clamor of protest in that there were no ears to hear and comprehend its utterance.¹¹⁰

Like the Sirens' call heard by Odysseus, the sound could not be ignored. Bassett's scientist's curiosity had to be satisfied, for he associated the sound with mystery and knowledge: "Was this, then, his dark tower?--Bassett pondered. . . ."¹¹¹ Believing the origin to be near, he abandoned his only link with civilization, the blackbirder Nari, and set out into the jungle. Almost immediately head-hunters attacked, slew his servant, and mutilated the scientist himself (two fingers lost, his skull slashed and deeply indented), before he repelled the savages.

Now began a nightmarish period ("Was it months, or years . . . ?"¹¹²) during which the ever-lurking cannibals and tropical fevers drove Bassett to the verge of insanity; yet, whenever possible, he continued to move toward that sound "like a benediction to his long-suffering, pain-wracked spirit."¹¹³ To the sick man,

the call became a symbol of life and promise set in contrast to the luxuriant jungle, ironically, a symbol of evil, death, and decay. Seldom has the naturalist's nightmare been more effectively conveyed than in the following passage:

But seared deepest of all in Bassett's brain, was the dank and noisome jungle. It actually stank with evil, and it was always twilight. Rarely did a shaft of sunlight penetrate its matted roof a hundred feet overhead. And beneath that roof was an aërial ooze of vegetation, a monstrous, parasitic dripping of decadent life-forms that rooted in death and lived on death. And through all this he drifted, ever pursued by the flitting shadows of the anthropophagi, themselves ghosts of evil that dared not face him in battle but that knew, soon or late, that they would feed on him.¹¹⁴

Miraculously Bassett escaped the jungle ringing the island and crossed the vast Guadalcanal savannah, arriving more dead than alive at the forest-covered foot of the inland mountains. There, in an unconscious state, he was found by Balatta, a loathsome parody of the heroine of romance. Dirt-caked and with a bloody pig's tail thrust through her left earlap, she resembled something more simian than human. But he owed her his life. She brought him to the village of her mountain tribe, and he resided there in decaying health, closely watched by Balatta, who wanted him as a love object,

and by Ngurn, the devil-devil or medicine man, who wanted his head. However, Bassett refused to let go of life, "for, like the genuine scientist he was, he would not be content to die until he had solved the secret of the sound."¹¹⁵

Quickly mastering the native language, Bassett became a crony of Ngurn, the priest, and in the smoky darkness of the devil-devil house, with its shrunken heads hanging from the rafters, the twentieth-century man of science and the representative of man's primordial beginning discussed the ultimate questions of good and evil, life and death. Often the conversation turned to the source of the sound, identified by Ngurn as the "Red One." He was their god, "more bestial powerful than the neighbor tribal gods, ever a-thirst for the red blood of living human sacrifices." Even those gods, asserted Ngurn, "were sacrificed and tormented before him."¹¹⁶ For generations had the Red One ruled, but the true nature of this deity remained a mystery to Bassett. No outsider could look upon the Red One--and live. Therefore, he could only question and be tantalized. Why, for example, did Ngurn refer to the Red One as the "Sun Singer" and the "Star-Born"?

Knowing that death was imminent, the scientist became so desperate for a glimpse of the "God-Voiced"

that he proposed a trade with the savage:

"When I die I'll let you have my head to cure, if first, you take me to look upon the Red One."

"I will have your head anyway when you are dead," Ngurn rejected the proposition. . . .

"Besides, you have not long to live. You are almost a dead man now. You will grow less strong. In not many months I shall have you here turning and turning in the smoke. It is pleasant, through the long afternoons, to turn the head of one you have known as well as I know you. And I shall talk to you and tell you the many secrets you want to know. Which will not matter, for you will be dead."¹¹⁷

Seeing that this stratagem was obviously fruitless, Bassett turned to the disgusting bushwoman, feigned love for her, and demanded in return that she lead him to the Red One. "A scientist first, a humanist afterward,"¹¹⁸ he cared little that should the tribe discover Balatta's transgression her dying would be long and excruciating.

To show her love for Bassett, Balatta acquiesced, and on a mountain mesa the scientist finally confronted the Red One. There in a deep pit he saw a red orb, "a perfect sphere, fully two hundred feet in diameter, the top of it . . . a hundred feet below the level of the rim."¹¹⁹ Over the anguished objections of the woman, Bassett descended to the object and found

the pit bottom carpeted with human bones, among which, battered and defaced, lay village gods of wood and stone. Some, covered with obscene totemic figures and designs, were carved from

solid tree trunks forty or fifty feet in length. He noted the absence of the shark and turtle gods, so common among the shore villages, and was amazed at the constant recurrence of the helmet motive. What did these jungle savages of the dark heart of Guadalcanal know of helmets? Had Mendana's men-at-arms worn helmets and penetrated here centuries before? And if not, then whence had the bush-folk caught the motive?¹²⁰

Bassett's examination showed the Red One to be of a metal scarred by intense heat and to be hollow at the core. As he touched its surface, the sphere quivered "under the fingertip caress in rhythmic vibrations that became whisperings and rustlings . . . of sound . . . like a peal from some bell of the gods reaching earthward from across space."¹²¹ For hundreds of years this celestial traveler had called out when struck during myriad human sacrifices, and the irony of the situation was almost too much for Bassett to accept. He

laughed aloud, almost with madness, at the thought of this wonderful messenger, winged with intelligence across space, to fall into a bushman stronghold and be worshiped by ape-like, man-eating and head-hunting savages. It was as if God's Word had fallen into the muck mire of the abyss underlying the bottom of hell; as if Jehovah's Commandments had been presented on carved stone to the monkeys . . . at the Zoo; as if the Sermon on the Mount had been preached in a roaring bedlam of lunatics.¹²²

Of major thematic importance, however, is the second level of irony in Bassett's situation, which the

protagonist is unable or unwilling to perceive. It lies in the conviction of this prototypical twentieth-century man that he is morally superior to the Melanesians. In reality his capacity for evil equals or exceeds that of the bushmen--but he never confronts his heart of darkness.

Bassett's moral blindness is clearly defined when, after his return from the secret visit to the Red One, he determines to let nothing stop him from discovering whatever truth is contained within the sphere. In his musings on the intelligences that sent the Red One, he wonders: "Had they won Brotherhood? Or had they learned that the law of love imposed the penalty of weakness and decay? Was strife, life? Was the rule of all the universe the pitiless rule of natural selection?"¹²³ Regardless of the answer, to crack this code of the higher priesthood, London's dubious hero is willing to wade through blood. As noted, he chose to risk a horrible death for Balatta just to view the object. Now he plots to escape and to "lead an expedition back, and, although the entire population of Guadalcanal be destroyed, extract from the heart of the Red One the message of the world from other worlds"¹²⁴ [emphasis mine] . Directed by modern man's only moral guide--the end justifies the means--Bassett, a scientist, prefigures the fathers of the mushroom cloud. Howard Lachtman recognized the

symbolic import of Bassett when he pointed out that in "The Red One" Jack London contrasted the South Sea primitives and civilized man "to mirror the essential savagery of even the highest representatives (scientists) of modern civilization and the western world."¹²⁵

Could a more appropriate time be chosen for the expression of this theme--1916, the year of Verdun and the Somme?

The relationship of this theme to the author's narrative method is part of "The Red One"'s success. In replacing his usual frame story technique with the limited third-person point of view, London made a propitious decision. For by viewing the action through Bassett's eyes, he created verisimilitude and, more significantly, conveyed the Jekyll and Hyde discrepancy between the protagonist's motive and method, his vision of himself and the reality, without a first-person or omniscient narrator preaching to the reader.

"The Red One" draws to a conclusion with Bassett's realization that he is never to leave Guadalcanal. He grows weaker by the day and knows that soon he will be added to Ngurn's collection. Therefore, to gain a last glimpse of the "Star-Born," he offers himself as a sacrifice before it. Borne on a litter by a dozen blacks, the scientist once more journeys to the high mesa and down

to the killing ground before the sphere. He is allowed to listen to its peal once more. Then the story concludes with a passage ranking with the most powerful that Jack London ever penned:

He knew, without seeing, when the razor-edged hatchet rose in the air behind him. And for that instant, ere the end, there fell upon Bassett the shadow of the Unknown, a sense of impending marvel of the rending of walls before the imaginable. Almost, when he knew the blow had started and just ere the edge of steel bit the flesh and nerves, it seemed that he gazed upon the serene face of the Medusa, Truth-- And, simultaneous with the bite of the steel on the onrush of the dark, in a flashing instant of fancy, he saw the vision of his head turning slowly, always turning, in the devil-devil house beside the breadfruit tree.¹²⁶

Herein London's archetypal quest motif blends with the images of death (Bassett's shrunken head) and life (the breadfruit tree) in a symbolic trinity of the writer's major themes.

A few years after her husband's death, Charmian London wrote: "Sometimes I wonder if it can be possible, in the ponderings of the dying scientist, Bassett, that Jack London revealed more of himself than he would have been willing to admit--or else, who knows? more of himself than he himself realized."¹²⁷ Her speculations are probabilities, not possibilities. Bassett's quest was the lifelong obsession of Jack London, and "The Red

One" contains the major themes and motifs of the author's better fiction: graphic violence, racial conflict, irony,¹²⁸ the search for a scientific justification for a belief in a reality beyond pessimistic naturalism (i.e., the message of the Red One), an obsession with death, and, finally, the inability of modern man to commit himself to anything beyond materialism and the physical facts of life as he experiences them. Although Bassett seems "to gaze upon . . . Medusa, Truth," the last image in his mind, before his spinal cord is severed, is of his "head turning slowly, always turning." Death, the Noseless One, has the stage alone.

Jack London wrote a great deal on a variety of subjects during the last summer and fall of his life. Nevertheless, his own mortality, Carl Jung's theories, and visions of the South Seas dominated his thoughts and imagination. When these subjects coalesced, "On the Makaloa Mat," "The Water Baby," "The Bones of Kahekili," "Shin Bones," and "The Red One" were produced. Of a pattern, these tales are similar in setting (only "The Red One"'s locale is outside Hawaii); use of Jungian archetypes; and contrasts between primitive islanders, whose beliefs give meaning and direction to their lives, and modern skeptics, who are looking for the missing

ingredient that gives purpose and meaning to life and death. However, their basic affinity lies in this last point, civilized man's questioning of his ultimate destiny. Jack London thought he had found a key to this mystery in the writings of Jung--but the perplexities of John Lakana, Hardman Pool, Prince Akuli, and Bassett demonstrate that Truth still hides her face.

Eighteen years earlier, when London was beginning his literary career, he received word that Fred Jacobs, a close friend, had died unexpectedly. Jack's terse comment was "He solved the mystery a little sooner."¹²⁹ In 1916 the mystery remained. For as these last short stories indicate, Jack London needed the impossible--a scientific, rationalistic basis for belief transcending naturalistic determinism. Some years after London died, the last mentor to fail him, C. G. Jung, succinctly summarized the source of the naturalist's frustrations:

. . . faith cannot be made: it is in the truest sense a gift of grace. We moderns are faced with the necessity of rediscovering the life of the spirit; we must experience it anew for ourselves. It is the only way in which we can break the spell that binds us to the cycle of biological events.¹³⁰

The stories analyzed in this chapter dramatize Jack London's search for the means to break the spell--it was a quest that failed.

NOTES

- ¹ Sinclair, pp. 169-174.
- ² Sinclair, p. 218.
- ³ It is staggering to contemplate the output of London's last years: The Night-Born (1913), John Barleycorn (1913), The Valley of the Moon (1913), The Mutiny of the Elsinore (1914), The Star Rover (1915), The Little Lady of the Big House (1915), and The Turtles of Tasman (1916); posthumously appeared Jerry of the Islands (1917), Michael, Brother of Jerry (1917), The Red One (1918), On the Makaloa Mat (1919), and Dutch Courage and Other Stories (1922).
- ⁴ Joan London, Jack London and His Times, p. 371.
- ⁵ Quoted by Sinclair, p. 220.
- ⁶ "To Joan London," 24 February 1914, Letters, p. 416.
- ⁷ "The Terrible and Tragic in Fiction," p. 543.
- ⁸ Joan London, pp. 372-373.
- ⁹ Sinclair, p. 220.
- ¹⁰ Charmian London, The Book of Jack London, II, p. 253.
- ¹¹ McClintock, p. 152.
- ¹² C. G. Jung, Psychology of the Unconscious, trans. by Beatrice M. Hinkle (New York: Moffat, Yard and Co.), 1916.
- ¹³ Charmian London, The Book of Jack London, II, p. 323.
- ¹⁴ Charmian London, pp. 357-358.
- ¹⁵ Charmian London, p. 359.

- 16 Earle Labor, p. 127.
- 17 Charmian London, The Book of Jack London, II
p. 367.
- 18 Charmian London, Jack London and Hawaii, p. 302.
- 19 Jack London, "On the Makaloa Mat," Cosmopolitan,
66 (March 1919), 16-23, 133-135. Collected in
On the Makaloa Mat (New York: Macmillan, 1919), pp. 1-40.
- 20 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 3.
- 21 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 40.
- 22 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 6.
- 23 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 15.
- 24 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 23.
- 25 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 9.
- 26 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 17.
- 27 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 21.
- 28 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 25.
- 29 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 26.
- 30 On the Makaloa Mat, pp. 27-29.
- 31 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 33.
- 32 On the Makaloa Mat, pp. 37-38.
- 33 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 38.
- 34 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 39.
- 35 On the Makaloa Mat, pp. 15-16.
- 36 Jack London, "The Water Baby," Cosmopolitan, 65
(September 1918), 80-85, 133. Collected in On the
Makaloa Mat, pp. 143-159.
- 37 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 143.

- 38 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 143.
- 39 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 144.
- 40 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 144.
- 41 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 144.
- 42 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 145.
- 43 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 147.
- 44 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 148.
- 45 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 148.
- 46 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 149.

The contention that John Lakana is a London surrogate is buttressed by the similar reactions of author and character to this creature. In Jack London and Hawaii (p. 76), Charmian London recorded that at the Honolulu Aquarium in 1907, the writer watched an octopus feeding:

The almost invisible squid, watching with one bright eye, unwreathed its eight flexible, trailing limbs, rose swiftly, swooped, and enfolded the prey as with a swirl of net or veiling. When the monster presently unwound, the mites of crabs had been entirely absorbed.

"And the Creator sat up nights inventing that," Jack observed, with sacrilegious gravity, slowly shaking his head. The superintendent looked appropriately startled. . . .

For London and Lakana the very existence of this beastie puts in question the argument from design.

- 47 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 150.
- 48 On the Makaloa Mat, pp. 150-151.
- 49 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 152.
- 50 Anthony Storr, C. G. Jung (New York: Viking Press, 1973), pp. 105-106.

51 While writing these last Hawaiian stories, Jack London was planning an historical novel about the discovery of America by the Norsemen. The following comment in his notes indicates his preoccupation with this new "science": "Get in interpretation of the genesis of their myths, etc., from their unconsciousness." Quoted by Charmian London, The Book of Jack London, II, p. 381.

52 Lachtman, p. 116.

53 On the Makaloea Mat, p. 159.

54 James I. McClintock, "Jack London's Use of Carl Jung's Psychology of the Unconscious," American Literature, 42 (November 1970), 336-347.

55 James I. McClintock, White Logic (Cedar Springs, Michigan: Wolf House Books, 1976), pp. 151-174.

56 White Logic, p. 159.

57 White Logic, p. 159.

58 White Logic, p. 159.

59 Jung, p. xxvi. Quoted by Charmian London, The Book of Jack London, II, p. 358.

60 White Logic, pp. 162-163.

61 White Logic, p. 173.

62 Jack London, "The Bones of Kahekili," Cosmopolitan, 67 (July 1919), 95-100, 102, 104. Collected in On the Makaloea Mat, pp. 41-77.

63 On the Makaloea Mat, p. 43.

64 White Logic, p. 165.

65 On the Makaloea Mat, p. 44. This passage and numerous others within this story are demonstrative of that curious paradox in London's fiction--the reoccurrence of an elitist concept of leadership (the great man born to rule) vying with his socialistic world view.

66 On the Makaloea Mat, p. 45.

- 67 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 64.
- 68 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 72.
- 69 On the Makaloa Mat, pp. 74-75.
- 70 There is an implicit criticism of the haole in this incident. The white man's coffin, clearly not part of the traditional ritual, disrupts the ceremony and almost costs Kumuhana his life.
- 71 On the Makaloa Mat, pp. 75-76.
- 72 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 76.
- 73 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 70
- 74 Lachtman, pp. 121-122.
- 75 White Logic, p. 166.
- 76 Magazine title "In the Cave of the Dead," Cosmopolitan, 65 (November 1918), 74-81, 119-121. Collected as "Shin Bones" in On the Makaloa Mat, pp. 106-142.
- 77 Akuli means squid in Hawaiian. The author's antipathy for that creature suggests that he chose a negative tag name intentionally.
- 78 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 109.
- 79 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 108.
- 80 On the Makaloa Mat, pp. 109-110.
- 81 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 112.
- 82 Lachtman, p. 116.
- 83 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 112.
- 84 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 106.
- 85 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 113.
- 86 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 113.
- 87 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 117.

- 88 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 119.
- 89 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 120.
- 90 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 125.
- 91 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 129.
- 92 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 130.
- 93 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 135.
- 94 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 135.
- 95 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 142.
- 96 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 137.
- 97 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 138.
- 98 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 138.
- 99 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 142.
- 100 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 141.
- 101 On the Makaloa Mat, p. 142.
- 102 Storr, p. 36.
- 103 Sinclair, p. 229.
- 104 Lachtman, p. 119.
- 105 McClintock, White Logic, p. 167.
- 106 Jack London, "The Red One," Cosmopolitan, 65 (October 1918), 34-41, 132, 135-138. Collected in The Red One (New York: Macmillan Co., 1918), pp. 1-50.
- 107 Earle Labor delivered a paper on "The Red One" at the 1979 meeting of the South Central Language Association.
- 108 As in earlier Melanesian stories, London employs animal metaphors to blur the distinction between the rational and irrational worlds. For example, the blacks

of Melanesia are "as much ape as human." They are "black and kinky-headed and monkey-like human beasts" and the hero likens himself to "a wounded bull pursued by plains' coyotes." When the protagonist opens fire on his attackers, one, "squalling like an infuriated cat," falls from a tree.

The Red One, pp. 49, 25, 10, 7.

109 Sinclair, p. 230.

110 The Red One, p. 1.

111 The Red One, p. 3.

112 The Red One, p. 3.

113 The Red One, p. 12.

114 The Red One, p. 10.

115 The Red One, p. 18.

116 The Red One, p. 19.

117 The Red One, p. 24.

118 The Red One, p. 29.

119 The Red One, pp. 31-32.

120 The Red One, pp. 32-33. In this long overlooked story, Jack London has apparently anticipated Erich Von Daniken's theory that space travelers visited earth in prehistoric times.

121 The Red One, p. 34.

122 The Red One, pp. 37-38.

123 The Red One, p. 41.

124 The Red One, p. 42.

125 Lachtman, p. 118.

126 The Red One, pp. 49-50.

127 Charmian London, The Book of Jack London, II, p. 334.

128 "The Red One"'s ultimate irony is historical. When Jack London wrote this story, few people in the western world had heard of Guadalcanal. But twenty-six years later it was the site of the first great land and sea battle of the Pacific war London predicted in "The Yellow Peril" (1904). Between August, 1942, and February, 1943, 1,752 Americans and 24,000 Japanese died in a bloodletting which dwarfed to insignificance the sacrifices to the Red One.

129 Quoted by Russ Kingman in A Pictorial Life of Jack London (New York: Crown Publishers, 1979), p. 274.

130 C. G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, trans. by W. S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1933), p. 122.

EPILOGUE

"I would rather be ashes than dust!
I would rather that my spark should burn
out in a brilliant blaze than it should
by stifled by dry-rot.
I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom
of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy
and permanent planet.
The proper function of man is to live, not
to exist.
I shall not waste my days in trying to
prolong them.
I shall use my time."

--Jack London

Jack London did not waste his days. When he died on November 22, 1916, he was only forty years of age; however, in his relatively brief lifetime, he had written two hundred fictive narratives and approximately four hundred non-fiction works: essays, newspaper articles, poems, reviews, sociological studies, and travel narratives. The course his career would have taken had he lived a normal life span has been the inevitable speculation of both his worldwide army of ardent admirers, whose numbers have grown for over three-quarters of a century, and the disinterested critics who have examined his literary pilgrimage. In this reader's opinion, the quality of Jack London's last stories indicates that the

author's creative ability, although enervated by illness, was still impressive. In fact, when viewed from the perspective of developing complexity of insight and a willingness to go beyond the limits of the tale of adventure, London's literary career was moving into previously unexplored regions. Indicative of these expanding vistas were the plans found among his notes for a new South Sea novel to be entitled The Pearl Man or The Sun God. Its proposed plot would trace an islander's search for the truths of life lying hidden behind "the futility of all art and human illusion."¹ Obviously, those philosophical and spiritual questionings embodied in the short stories analyzed in the last chapter continued to obsess him and to dominate his literary imagination. Given improved health and the financial security needed to write more slowly and carefully, London could have yet utilized his personal conflicts and concomitant maturity of vision in the creation of those great works that had eluded him throughout his career.

Regardless of what might have been, Jack London will be remembered primarily as the master of the Northland adventure story. However, as this dissertation has demonstrated, his South Sea narratives (which constitute twenty percent of his fictional canon) are undeserving

of that anonymity to which they have been relegated-- a footnote in literary surveys of American naturalism.

The sixteen works analyzed in this study illustrate the major themes and motifs of London's South Pacific narratives: the paradox of an idealized romantic hero-- London himself in his travel book The Cruise of the Snark and Captain David Grief in The Son of the Sun collection--struggling for dominance in a naturalistically defined universe; the explicit, and often excessive, use of violence, suffering and death in such tales as "Hauki" and Adventure to demonstrate the naturalist's law of life; the successful employment of irony in "The Inevitable White Man," "The Chinago," and "The Red One" to challenge his oft espoused doctrine of white racial superiority; and, finally, the use of Jungian theories in "The Water Baby," "The Bones of Kahekili," and "Shin Bones" to explore the possibilities of escape from the spirit-destroying trap of determinism. These themes set the South Sea stories apart from the rest of London's fiction either in degree or kind. For example, such Northland tales as "Lost Face" and "Love of Life," convey the naturalist's thesis that life is a trap, or, at best, a losing game. But the South Sea works are-- with a few exceptions, such as "The Seed of McCoy"--his

grimmiest and most pessimistic. Likewise, his racial theories are most explicitly stated in these stories and then often undercut by irony, a technique seldom utilized in the Klondike tales. Finally, with the single exception of "Like Argus of the Ancient Times," an Alaskan story contained in The Red One, London's Jungian tales are all South Pacific narratives.

Beyond an analysis of South Sea themes, this study has attempted to demonstrate the artistic strengths and weaknesses of this frustratingly inconsistent writer. The poignancy of his description of the dying Marquesans in The Cruise of the Snark, the power and naturalistic detail in his rendering of the oncoming hurricane in "The Pearls of Parlay," the well-paced action sequences of "The Inevitable White Man" and "Koolau the Leper," the contrasts of "The Water Baby," the savage irony of "The Chinago," and the subtle psychology insights of "The Red One" exist side by side with passages of hackneyed prose, stereotyped characterization, and propagandistic verbiage.

One of the few writers of the first rank never ashamed to admit his appreciation for and debt to Jack London was George Orwell. And he saw to the heart of the critical difficulties involved in determining

London's "place" in American literary history when he wrote that "even his best stories have the curious quality of being well told and yet not well written: they are told with admirable economy, with just the right incidents in just the right place, but the texture of the writing is poor, the phrases are worn and obvious, and the dialogue is erratic."² Not a great prose stylist, London was a natural and gifted story teller who will reside forever in that twilight zone between "popular" and "serious" literature. Fifty-one years ago, Clinton Hartley Grattan commented that in any evaluation of Jack London's achievement "the least critical bias" will swing the balance beam significantly. However, he concludes that "there is great writing in London, and he will remain to puzzle the historians of American literature for years to come."³ If for too many years the enigma of Jack London was ignored by the literary community, the situation is changing. Yet in all probability, his short stories and novels will seldom be required reading in other than surveys of American literary naturalism--and this is unfortunate, for he is a writer whose perversely honest works tell us much about where we come from and who we are.

NOTES

¹ Sinclair, p. 222.

² Orwell, p. 29.

³ Clinton Hartley Grattan, "Jack London," Bookman, 68 (February 1929), 667.

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